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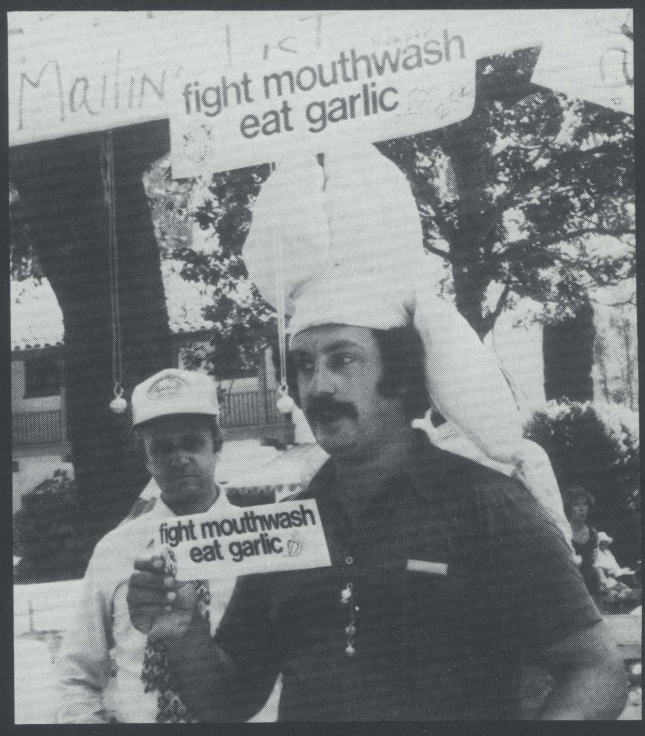

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SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SUMMER 1982 · VOLUME 51 No 3

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.

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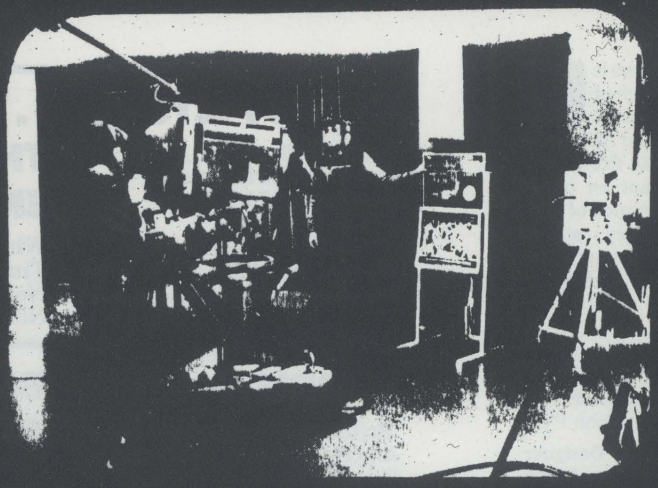

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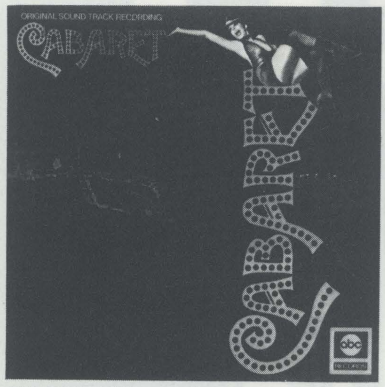

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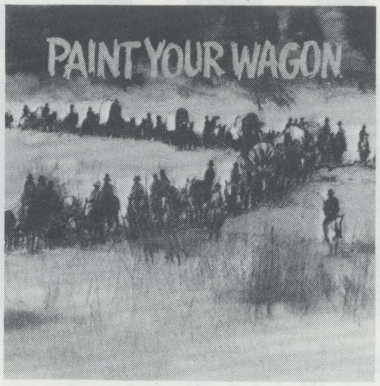

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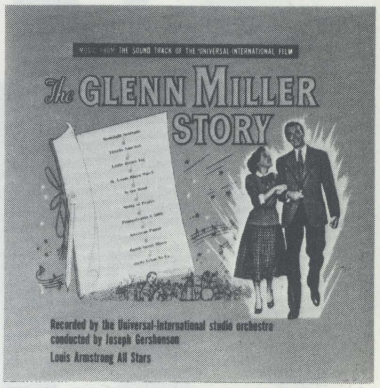

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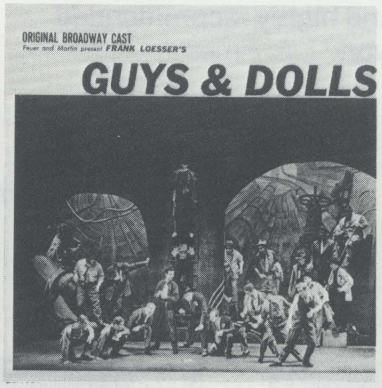

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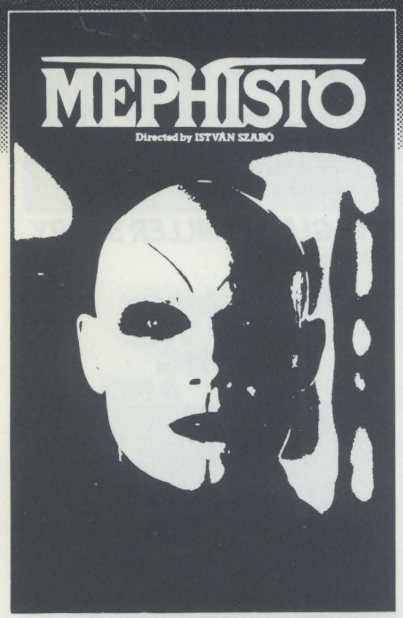

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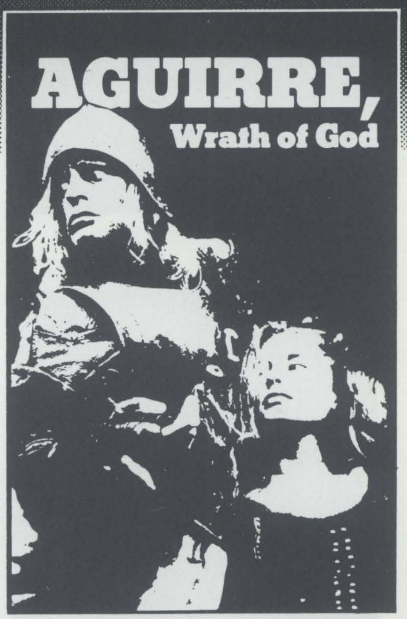

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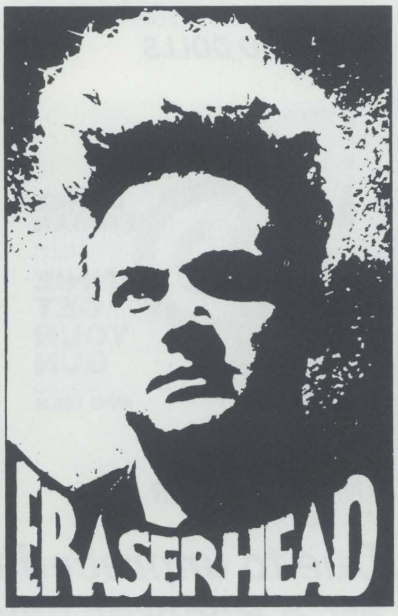
'One of the sickest movies ever made and one of the funniest' Andy Warhol's Interview



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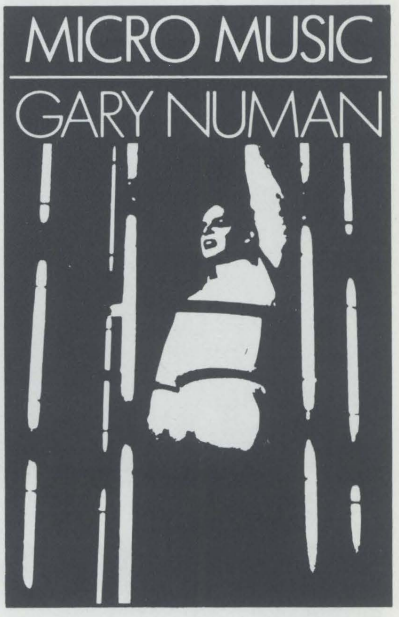

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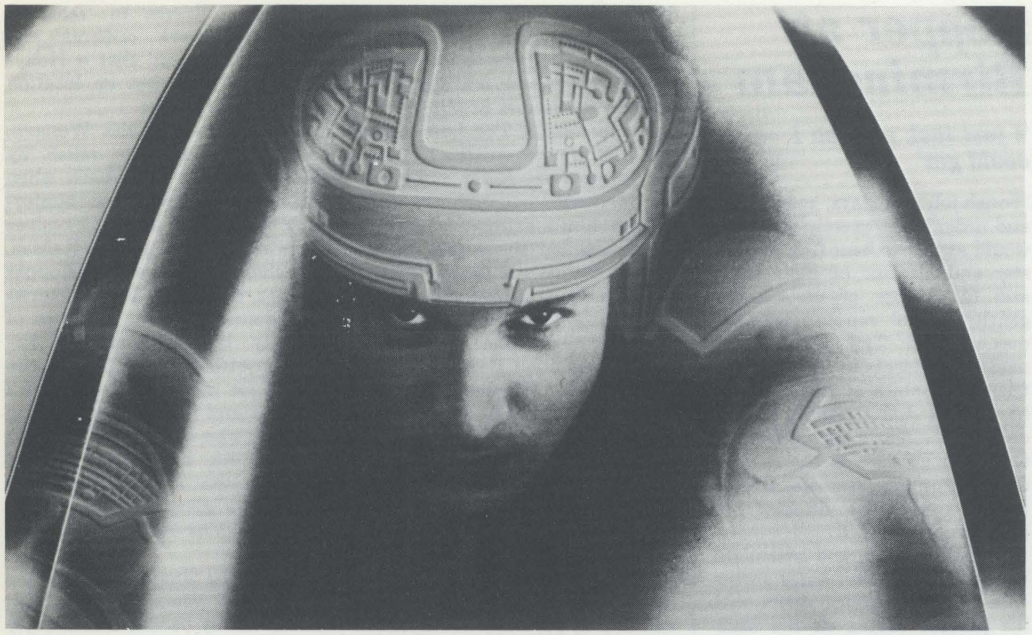


'Tron': Bruce Boxleitner as the rebellious video warrior.

Tron

A new science fantasy puts computerised special effects through their paces

George Lucas used the computer to guide his camera for the special effects in *Star Wars*, and it has been a staple of effects movies ever since. But a Disney film due for release in the United States in July and in Britain in December uses the computer in a way which could make obsolete much of what has always defined Hollywood: huge soundstages, big sets and armies of craftsmen. The film is *Tron*, directed by 30-year-old Steve Lisberger, and its story concerns a designer of computerised video games (Jeff Bridges). Somehow finding himself inside one of his own creations, he discovers a world populated by beings made of electricity and light. One of these is the warrior of the game 'Tron' whom he must fight to escape from the machine.

Many of the sets, costumes and even background characters did not exist on the soundstage or even as special effects miniatures. The images were created by a computer, using advances made in the last decade in digital technology by defence contractors. 'We're using a combination of technologies for the first time. Never have backgrounds and ships and whole environments been computer simulated,' said Richard Taylor, who is supervising the *Tron* effects with Harrison Ellenshaw.

The live action filming was almost incidental to its making; actors dressed in black went through their motions against a black background. Computers and other special effects techniques will add everything but their faces. Glows will seep through the seams of the special effects costumes, making the characters appear to be beams of energy. The *Tron* soundstages had no actors scurrying around in robes from their dressing rooms or technicians lugging cameras. The movie set of the future is an electronic console.

'I became interested in computers as a result of my interest in animation, in creating fantasy worlds,' Lisberger said. 'The computer could replace a lot of existing special effects work, and I think it will do away with expensive unskilled or semi-skilled labour. In this film it did replace whole sets.' All this has grown out of hardware developed by US government contractors who have invented and refined systems for training airforce pilots. A trainee now views a screen which simulates a three-dimensional landscape.

One of the companies, Information International, used this kind of technology last year to synthesise the first actor. He is 'Adam Powers', a dapper little chap in tuxedo and top hat who juggles colourful objects while standing on a checkerboard tile floor. He moves with an astonishing human suppleness: the only tip off is his face, which his maker didn't bother to animate.

The Adam Powers test film is also a showpiece for the computer's ability to simulate everyday objects. Adam's black patent leather shoes and shiny top hat catch the light as the view changes and he casts subtle shadows. The floor looks like real tile. Adam's creator Richard Taylor winces at the thought that electronic actors could put the flesh and blood variety out of business, yet even conservative computer designers concede that a digitally produced character could be made in the very near future which could deceive an audience.

A group at the New York State Institute of Technology plans to go even further than *Tron* with an animated feature, a space fantasy called *The Works*, which will be entirely created by computer. It will have the first synthesised human in a major movie role. Other producers are beginning to ride this electronic wave, notably George Lucas who has formed his own research and development team to refine computer simulation as a director's tool.

One can only imagine the uses to which visionaries like Lucas could put computer imaging. 'We can create a body of any size, texture or shape and put it into any environment,' Taylor says. 'In *Tron* we have a vehicle called the "Solar Sailer". It has levitating steps, looks like a dragonfly with big gossamer wings and even carries computer-created passengers.' Computer imaging can view an object from any angle, and zoom in, around or through it.

Computer simulation also gives a film-maker powers of revision. Halfway through the production of *Tron*, Lisberger decided the colour of some blue robots veined with black lines was wrong. So he pushed a few buttons and the robots in all their scenes became black with blue and red lines. A director working in film would have had to reshoot the movie to make such a change. Will this turn the most collaborative of enterprises into a solitary effect at a control board? With the ability to create and revise the whole thing almost by himself, a director could continue changing characters, backgrounds, props, colours and lighting effects until the time of a movie's showing. Michael Cimino, whose $35 million epic *Heaven's Gate* barely breathed at the box-office, might have wished to be able to go back to an electronic drawing board.

JIM SEALE

Greek revival

Minister Mercouri favours the independents

The present mood of optimism in the Greek cinema derives chiefly, although not wholly, from the election last October of the first socialist government in fifty years. The most important change, from the point of view of the independent cinema, has been the appointment as Minister of Culture of the actress and film-maker Melina Mercouri. The programme of reform being drawn up by her Ministry should, if only partly successful, go some way towards revitalising the flagging independent sector and encourage a number of young and up to now neglected directors.

One of Mercouri's first acts as Minister was to examine the running of the Greek Film Centre. This government department is responsible for funding independent projects and was until recently under the Ministry of Industry. Mercouri has taken control of the supposedly non-political Film Centre and begun to shift its traditional bias against the Left. Already the Film Centre's budget has been considerably increased.

The Ministry of Culture is also drawing up plans for a National Academy of Film and Television. Previously, the only educational bodies specialising in film-making have been private schools of a low technical standard. And, as further proof of the increased interest in and respect for independent directors, the Greek Association of Film-makers has elected the father of modern Greek cinema, Theodoros Angelopoulos, as its president for 1982.

Although these changes will naturally benefit the independent cinema, it would be wrong to conclude that what is now happening in Greece is entirely due to the new government. In a sense, the socialists are merely removing barriers which have frustrated but not silenced a generation of directors. A good example of someone who has kept working is Nikos Zervos, a director who attracted attention in the late 70s with *Exiled on Central Avenue*. Zervos had just finished a second film, *Impale Them*, at the time of the elections. Under the new government, which immediately abolished censorship laws first introduced at the time of the German Occupation, he was able to add one new scene; but, with or without a change in the law, his new film would certainly have been released. The new government is making things easier; however, as one critic pointed out, it is not creating a new generation of film directors overnight.

As for the established film-

makers, their fortunes have varied over the past year. Little has been heard of Nikos Panayatopoulos since the critical and commercial failure of his last film *Melodrama*. Pandelis Voulgaris, who had a disappointing and much more costly failure with *Eleftherios Venizelos*, has been working in television, directing *The Garden of Statues*, a warmly received short series.

Since the change in government, it is likely that independent directors will increasingly be drawn into television. Greece has two TV channels, the state-owned ERT, and YENED, which until recently was controlled by the armed forces. Although the details have yet to be settled, the military is to lose control of YENED which will become either independent or part of ERT. As a result of this, YENED has been liberalised and more experimental work is being encouraged in both organisations. The socialists are mounting a determined (if daunting) campaign to stamp out nepotism in public bodies, and this too should lead to more young film-makers entering television.

Angelopoulos himself has been working for YENED, shooting a documentary on the population drift from the villages into the cities—a common feature of postwar Greece. He selected one particularly remote region, assembled his crew and arrived in the chosen village as the last inhabitant was disappearing with all his possessions in the direction of the nearest city. Angelopoulos persuaded him to stay just long enough to complete shooting.

Angelopoulos has also been trying, with difficulty, to strike a major co-production deal between ERT and the Film Centre. His new project is an adaptation of *The Third Wreath*, one of the most significant novels to have emerged from postwar Greece. This is something of a new departure. It will be the first time that Angelopoulos has collaborated on one of his scripts (the co-writer is the novel's author Costas Tachtsis) and the first time that he has used a story by another writer.

Bureaucratic changes in Greece are notoriously slow, and often ineffectual, but many people involved in the industry believe that the government will hold to its reforms and achieve most of its aims. This optimism encompasses the feeling that it is now possible to say out loud things that five years ago had to be left unsaid or represented symbolically. As one film-maker now working in television put it: 'Directors realise they can turn their attention to external problems, the problems of the real world, without having to be allegorical or evasive. After such a long time in the dark, that's a very good feeling, like coming out of a long tunnel into the light.'

PAUL MANSFIELD

Hopper at Birmingham

'I just took any job I could get'

'Tough job nowadays, keeping law and order.' Not exactly what you would expect to hear from the co-star and director of *Easy Rider* and the bearer of an extravagantly 'gonzo' reputation—Dennis Hopper. The remark was made in March to a couple of friendly bobbies at the Birmingham Arts Lab, where Hopper delivered an out-of-London Guardian Lecture at the close of an enterprising retrospective of his work as actor, director and photographer.

Genial, relaxed and articulate, Hopper outlined his early career, checking biographical facts with his parents seated in the audience. Under the tutelage of John Swope and Dorothy McGuire at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California, his roles included Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice* and a walk-on in James Cain's dramatisation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Television shows led to his first film role in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Together Hopper and James Dean saw themselves as perpetuating the spirit of rebellion pioneered by Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift. 'Do it, don't show it,' was the advice on acting that Dean gave Hopper, five years his junior; after Dean's death, however, Hopper ignored his mentor's advice not to study with Lee Strasberg, and spent five years at the Actors Studio.

A screening of *The Last Movie* (the *film maudit* written by Hopper before *Easy Rider* and made for Universal Pictures in the wake of that film's extraordinary success) curtailed the survey of his career; but he diffidently admitted, explaining a term of absence from Hollywood, 'I was difficult to work with.' Hopper also mentioned that John Cassavetes had been Wim Wenders' original choice for Ripley in *The American Friend* and sketched the characteristic changes he had wrought on the original script of *Out of the Blue*, before assuming direction of the picture two and half weeks into shooting (none of that footage survived). He struck out a moralistic voice-over commentary by psychiatrist Raymond Burr and decided to include mother and daughter in the cataclysmic finale: 'I thought, Why not kill 'em all?' In an aside, Hopper observed that each of his films concludes in flames.

The element of psychodrama evident in *Out of the Blue* firmly links that film to *The Last Movie*, soon to be given a long-delayed British release. In contrast to Hopper's earlier emphasis on 'the reality of acting', *The Last Movie* is an elaborate construction to show the artifice of cinema, a vision crazily refracted and distorted through the efforts of Peruvian villagers to 'remake', with wickerwork cameras and lights, a 'Western' that a Hollywood crew has shot on location around their homes.

The director of the Western, played with suitable relish by Sam Fuller ('I want balls when you die!'), has a Peruvian counterpart, also equipped with revolver and Confederate hat, but Kansas, the character played by Hopper himself, is adrift, a Flying Dutchman deprived of any safe port of identity. His equilibrium is further unsettled by a girlfriend who yearns for the twin comforts of a fur coat and a GEC fridge and by a buddy who needs $500 to locate a goldmine, but hopes to find it with the slender geological knowledge gleaned from Walter Huston in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*.

Seeing the film for the first time in several years, Hopper still stands firmly behind it and wryly attributes its burial by Universal to his own misunderstanding of Hollywood in the early 70s: 'I thought they wanted a different kind of movie.' Through intricate corporate manoeuvres Universal actually turned a profit on the shelved movie, but one can admit a sneaking sympathy for the company when faced with this bizarre hybrid. A post-Godardian generation should, however, not be fazed by *The Last Movie*.

The film's constant emphasis on the illusory nature of cinema, its ramshackle 'deconstruction' of a genre and above all its refusal to allow the audience the conventional luxury of a fixed relationship to events on screen, were not the best strategies to hold a generation with an ever-dwindling attention span. With Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* in the wings, *The Last Movie* seems even more timely, and comes similarly garnished with lurid production stories (a jailed producer, a revolution halfway through shooting, rows with the Catholic Church). Eccentric, rambling and marvellous.

Twenty-two of the 420 photographs by Hopper held by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington were on view in Birmingham. The selection concentrated on casually posed portraits of friends from the 60s, Dean Stockwell, Ed Keinholz and James Rosenquist, but also included memorable shots of Civil Rights marches, the so-called Sunset Riots, movie people and locations, and a hoarding exhorting the passer-by to 'Observe Holy Week at Forest Lawn'.

A skilful maker of the reputation of others (he had wanted *Easy Rider* to be Jack Nicholson's film and *Out of the Blue* to 'belong' to Linda Manz), Hopper is really needed in a bland Hollywood of the 80s, where his qualities of intelligence, grace and wit are, sadly, at a premium.

NIGEL ALGAR

'The Last Movie': Sam Fuller and Dennis Hopper.

Oberhausen

Juries place a premium on leftish polemics

Given that the short film is forever in crisis, it is not surprising that Oberhausen, the largest and best organised of short film festivals, should this year have reflected an ever-growing divergence between aims and achievements, between East and West, between capitalism and whatever else there may be. Throughout the West, the short film remains probably the most underfunded of all art forms, and documentaries have been gobbled up by television. Animation still thrives, but it is left chiefly to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the studios of the National Film Board of Canada to keep alive the self-sufficient short intended for theatrical exhibition.

Nowadays, apart from the isolated instance, the former wide range of shorts has been reduced to two main categories, the polemic or agitprop film and the far more assiduously cultivated short feature. The latter, from once having been a respected form, seems to have become the young film-maker's calling card: scripted not for the finest effect as a short film, but to display as many skills as possible. Even this, however, can produce works of quality. For instance, Stephen Blackman's British entry, *8 Track*, made witty use of its subject, film style.

The festival's outstanding entry was *Extended Play*, by David Casci and Chris Perry, from California. Its method is black slapstick, using vulgarity to satirise the vulgarity of amusement arcades, and accelerating violence to point up the social self-destructiveness of technology abused in video games. It won a sheaf of diplomas and commendations but no cash prize. It was clear from the prizes awarded by eight different juries that polemics—and particularly leftish polemics—are valued more highly at Oberhausen than conciseness or a talent to delight through visual wit.

The strongest agitprop pieces came from Holland and Canada. *You Can't Live in a Tank*, by Kollektiv Dwarsfilm, shows police brutality against Amsterdam squatters; and *If You Love This Planet*, by Terri Nash, effectively intercuts the talking head of the anti-nuclear campaigner Dr Helen Caldicott and archive footage illustrating her arguments. A deceptively casual Cuban film, *The History of a Cargo* by Melchor Casals, illustrates a problem endemic to every socialist economy, the chaos in small matters which results from diffused responsibility, in this case over the unloading of a shipment of paper. The other Latin American films said most when they dealt with the disadvantages of women, but they said it repeatedly and lengthily. The Bulgarian attitudes revealed in Adela Peeva's *Unmarried Mothers* showed a male chauvinism barely matched even in South America.

The taste of most juries was gauged accurately, and a large number of prizes went to the Hungarian TV documentary *The Witch of Bagohegy*, in modest black and white. Much of its success is due to its heroine, a sprightly widow of 91, but director Laszlo Mihalyfi deserves credit for avoiding the fly-on-the-wall fallacy. He and his crew became catalysts for confrontation, forcing the narrow-minded members of the village where the widow lives to explain their superstitions, and laying themselves open to some gentle ridicule by the old woman.

To the consternation of all but the most cynical, the main prize of the main jury (they debated from teatime to 6 am) went to *Mother Earth*, from the USSR, made at the Tiflis Theatre Academy by Goderdzi Tchocheli. It seems, even after a second viewing, an elegy on rural depopulation, bristling with technical and thematic shortcomings and with embarrassingly staged details of peasant life. However, I may have missed a clue. When an old woman sits on her terrace polishing some ethnographic exhibits from a local museum, it occurred to me that a closer translation of her voice-over commentary might have revealed a travelogue on Georgia, and what seemed like a gratuitous curse on wayfarers could have been a commercial for a vacation wonderland.

MARI KUTTNA

'Conan the Barbarian'.

Milius and Conan

'Just the kind of movie I'd like to see tonight'

When John Huston gave his Guardian Lecture at the National Film Theatre last year, I asked him about John Milius, the most quixotic yet least known of the youthful film-makers featured in *The Movie Brats*. Huston had directed a Milius script, *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*, and had played Teddy Roosevelt's level-headed adviser in Milius' *The Wind and the Lion*. 'John Milius is not of our time,' Huston said. 'He is a throwback to a different age, a Viking or a samurai, an extraordinary individual.'

I recently spent two days with Milius, at the Burbank Studios where he was working on the final mix of *Conan the Barbarian*, and at his house on the western edge of Bel Air. The studio headquarters of his A-Team company (which produced Schrader's *Hardcore* and Spielberg's *1941*) resembles a military command post, with guns and uniforms strewn about and huge blow-ups of mushroom clouds on the walls; one half expects his craziest creation, Colonel Kilgore from *Apocalypse Now*, to stride in.

At Milius' home, in the kitchen, there is a small sketch of another mushroom cloud with the scrawled legend, 'Let's get it over with.' On his Saturday off, Milius compulsively builds model jet fighters and gives his two young sons advice on armed combat. His surfboards, which, he says, he hasn't used for several years, are stacked in the garage and his spacious den, the Red Room, has framed quotations of the revered Teddy Roosevelt, and a world map stuck with red pins in such areas as Vietnam and El Salvador. Milius unlocks a door and shows me his fabled armoury, saying that 'My family will be one of the last to go if it comes to a fight.' The decorative swords used in *Conan* stand in a corner and I can hardly lift them, but then *Conan* stars ex-Mr Universe Arnold Schwarzenegger, who handles them with the grace of Toshiro Mifune in the Kurosawa films that Milius admires so much.

Milius has been working on *Conan* for nearly three years and he's exhausted but delighted. 'The film is based on characters created by Robert Howard, who wrote the stories for *Weird Tales* magazine in the 30s before he blew his brains out. The project was offered to me at the right time as I'd been developing ideas along similar lines, like a Viking picture or an epic about Genghis Khan who is one of my greatest heroes. The stories weren't set in any particular place or time, though I see Conan living in the 9th century in the area now called Afghanistan, which gives us a reason for the mix of Oriental and Occidental characters.'

The budget for *Conan* was $20 million, by no means unusual these days, especially for a historical epic, and Milius is proud that every cent is on the screen. 'Making the picture was like walking through mud. We seemed to be staging the same battle every day for months, with hundreds of Spanish extras, horses, camels, snakes. *Conan* is the type of picture I've always

planned to make, about pagans and pantheists, which is how I would describe myself, about the purity and glory of battle, the strength of the individual, about myth. *Conan* would have been a big hit in Germany in the 30s as it is a deeply Nietzschean concept. In fact we begin the film with a quote from him—'That which does not kill us makes us stronger.'

Apart from logistics, *Conan* has had its share of problems, including the early replacement of the director of photography. At the dubbing studio Milius leaned across and said, 'I really hate it when people ask who my DP was. They should ask me who the stunt co-ordinator was.' The stunting, judging from the hour of film I saw, was remarkable, with horses and riders falling into forests of sharpened stakes and grotesque booby-traps. Against a soundtrack of choral music, Schwarzenegger swings his oversized axe into a rider's chest and blood gushes over the horse. Although the violence is like a cartoon strip, Milius has run into problems. 'One of the reasons for the film's slight delay is that I've had to trim some of the violence and the ratings board here took exception to a love scene.' Milius was buoyant about the film's commercial prospects. '*Conan*,' he said, 'is just the kind of movie that I'd like to see tonight.'

ADRIAN TURNER

Censors in conclave

Classification favoured over cuts and bans

James Ferman's International Conference on the Classification and Regulation of Cinema Films, attended by some 45 senior film censors from 29 countries in all six continents and held in London during March, was, astonishingly, the first ever international get-together of film censors. The strongest impression left by this five-day meeting was how sophisticated and civilised the participants were: the image that came to mind was that of ombudsmen. This was partly due to a pronounced liberalism of attitude, particularly in those from the developed countries: the censors from developing countries tended to show somewhat greater elements of puritanism.

Perhaps the most striking revelation was the strong emphasis on classification, as opposed to cutting or banning, as the main function of a film censorship board and the almost total transfer of concern from sex to violence. This was true not only of the North Europeans but also of many of the Canadian, Australasian and other boards. The British Board was, it seemed, in a cautious mid-position. Many boards saw their task as primarily one of guidance, particularly to parents, and of consumer protection rather than community policing. Indeed, one finds a far more aggressive and restrictive attitude among copyright holders than among most of the censors at this conference. Just as a liberal consumer policy relies primarily on clear and accurate labelling, with bans on product safety grounds kept to a minimum, so here the emphasis was on information backed, in extremis, by bans or cuts on mental safety grounds.

The discussions throughout were overwhelmingly concerned with the problems of violence and particularly sex-linked violence. Both the Danish criminologist Berl Kutchinsky and the Wisconsin psychologist Ed Donnerstein argued, in their papers on pornography, that straight sex in films, even if very hardcore, was no problem. And the audience by and large agreed. What was worrying was the increasing amount and intensity of violence, much of it gratuitous and much of it either overtly sexual or directed at women as terror subjects or a combination of both. Often scenes of or inducing sexual perversion were accompanied by subliminal reassurances: the victim revived after the multiple rape and reconciled herself with the rapists or indicated that it had after all been an exhilarating experience. Or romantic music and sensual scenes were intercut with violence. The exploitation of the 'actresses' in such films was also briefly mentioned.

The socialising effect of such violence, as well as the question of direct incitement to violent conduct, was the subject of Hilde Himmelweit's paper on the protection of children and a leitmotiv of the conference. Certainly, no other ground of adult censorship received such significant discussion. Classification to protect children was, however, also of great concern although there was no unanimity about how to do it, what the age brackets should be or even how effective it was. Much emphasis was placed on the responsibility of the parents and on the importance of reflecting the standards of the community rather than those of the dominant élite.

But accompanying the discussion of these visible current concerns was an undercurrent of awareness, which only surfaced in the last two days, that censorship (or classification) of films for theatrical exhibition was rapidly being overtaken by changes in the structure of the audiovisual entertainment trade. The video media were essentially international, and the growth of transborder television, satellite TV, videocassettes and discs, and cable TV as other means of circulating or viewing films were likely to leave traditional film censors stranded with a minority exhibition form. Those present were on the whole not sufficiently instructed in the economics or technology of these new forms of distribution to allow them to discuss in any depth the hints given by some of the later speakers, but they were uneasily conscious of the coming change.

And rightly so. For the conference took place against a background of massive legislative movement. No fewer than three concurrent measures were going through Parliament: the Dissemination of Pornography Bill (sharpening the rules prohibiting the trading in pornography calculated to arouse or gratify lascivious appetites); the Cinematograph Bill (sponsored by the British Board of Film Censors and drastically altering the existing basis of film censorship so as to include all film exhibitions for private gain, even if given in the home); and the 'sex establishments' clause of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which will bring sex clubs and porno-cinema clubs under licensing control.

The Swedish Act to forbid the dissemination of films and videograms containing scenes of violence was passed in June 1981; and one month after the conference the Norwegian Government introduced its Bill to penalise the showing of scenes of violence in films, videograms or on television. At the same time a French decree to liberalise film censorship, which has been held up by inter-Ministerial squabbling, apparently reverses part of the trend by removing violent films from the fiscal censorship and from the possibility of banning (which will be virtually abolished) but keeping hardcore pornography in its specially high tax band.

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

Advertisement for the cassette 'The Driller Killer'. The DPP is considering prosecution in the case of this and other violent videos.

New Bulgarians

Villagers disappear after they are rained with pumpkins and a dictionary . . .

More than twenty feature films, well funded by the Committee of Culture, were shot in Bulgaria during 1980–81, and many showed that directors had been able to escape the censor's previous puritanism and rigidity to make more personal and critical statements. The influence of the late Lyudmilla Zhivkova, president of the committee and daughter of Bulgaria's long-serving premier, had proved crucial, for she promoted both contact with the non-socialist world and the 'new nationalism' which inspired several of the more noteworthy films. The withdrawal of subsidies from cinemas had led to the showing of more Western films, as managers had to consider profitability and public taste. Hence, while Soviet films were generally spurned—*Moscow Distrusts Tears* attracted thin audiences—*The Way We Were*, curiously, was shown in March 1981 in a season honouring the 12th Communist Party Congress.

Binka Zhelyazkova's *The Great Night Bathing* is perhaps the most critical of the new films: an indictment of the shallowness and irresponsibility of the young communist generation. It turns on the doubts of a girl (Yanina Kasheva) immersed in the *dolce vita* of a group of boorish holidaymakers from Sofia, yet torn by her love for a young Macedonian. He returns from the Black Sea to his home amid the lunar rocks of Melnik to care for an ailing mother. The Sofians chance upon an empty film set and enact an ancient Thracian death ritual as if it were a game. Yet the force of ancient custom strikes and one of them is accidentally hanged. The police are summoned to determine who caused the death by kicking a stone from beneath the victim's feet. The girl, sickened by the callousness of her comrades, flees to Melnik, where the film ends with her asking, in sobs, who had kicked away the stone.

This central act is used by the director to symbolise the severance of tradition, for which she indicts no particular individuals or groups, but the entire socialist order. Behind the girl's flight to Melnik lies her need for the continuity and purpose of the rural community, values which Zhelyazkova believes have been lost in the imposition of a soulless industrialism on Bulgaria. This has not produced propaganda's 'new man', but a cynical and shiftless generation that the girl painfully rejects.

Illusion, by Lyudmil Stoichev, focuses on the commitment of the

Kamelia Todorova in 'The Tsarina of Turnovo'.

artist. Set in the 1920s, it follows the paths of two brothers, a populist revolutionary and a painter, as they attempt one to fight and the other to accommodate to the dictatorial regime of Dr Tsankov. After the street murder of his brother, the artist escapes to Mount Vitosha where he meets a crazed peasant who recounts an apparently meaningless story, shot with striking effect. He describes how his village was rained with pumpkins and a dictionary, and how the obsession of his neighbours with the word 'abstraction' (found in the dictionary) caused them to disappear. The mad episode proves to be an illusion, spun to avoid confronting the truth—that after the *coup d'état* of June 1923, when the army deposed the Agrarian Party from the government, soldiers massacred the village. Acknowledgment of the truth leads to more violence.

Several historical films were shot in 1981 to celebrate the 1,300th anniversary of the foundation of the first Bulgarian state. *Measure for Measure*, a three-part epic of the Macedonian struggle against Ottoman Turkish rule, was certainly the most lavish and prestigious (though in the event a box-office failure). By seeming to repeat Bulgarian claims to the southernmost republic of Yugoslavia, it contributed to a deterioration of relations between the two Slav states of the Balkans. Directed by Georgi Dyulgerov, the three films trace the revolutionary career of Atanas, a fictitious shepherd (played by Russi Chanev) who encounters in his fights and wanderings real historical characters. The film provoked criticism from party and nationalist quarters for its refusal to glorify the rebellion and for the gritty realism of its recreation of turn-of-the-century Macedonia.

Yanko Yankov's *The Tsarina of Turnovo* acknowledged the new power of the public, by casting the pop singer Kamelia Todorova in the title role. The success of her screen debut assured the success of the film, a pessimistic period romance, reminiscent of Thomas Hardy in its portrayal of the hopeless love between a wealthy doctor and his servant. Dismissed by the doctor's mother, the 'tsarina', as she is nicknamed, moves in protest, first into a brothel and then into a leper camp to nurse victims of the Balkan War. Stylishly directed and rich in local colour, this proved one of the year's more popular films.

STEPHEN ASHLEY

Moreau in London

'There are no indiscreet questions, only indiscreet answers'

Jeanne Moreau, who was in London in April for a Guardian Lecture and a BBC interview, aims to start shooting her third feature, which is as yet untitled and which will probably be set in Australia, later this year. She will be co-writer with the American novelist Jim Harrison and would like Robert de Niro, with whom she worked on *The Last Tycoon*, to play one of the two principals. Although, at 54, Moreau the actress rejects the image of *femme fatale*, for which she still amply qualifies, she also confesses to rather liking it. She was in candid mood. She admitted, for instance, that despite the *succès de scandale* of *Les Amants* in 1958, which consolidated her career and that of the director Louis Malle, she found her celebrated nude scene quite normal, even in the moral climate then prevailing in France.

Jeanne Moreau's English mother was a Tiller Girl and danced at the Folies Bergère, and Jeanne herself spent some of her childhood with grandparents at Littlehampton (where she was in the Brownies but never made the Guides). She was inspired to go on the stage by a performance of Anouilh's *Antigone* in Occupied Paris and rapidly gained a name for herself in the early 50s at the Comédie Française and the Théâtre Nationale Populaire. She also enjoyed a lesser known parallel career in the decade before the New Wave broke as an actress in some twenty films with such as Fernandel, Gabin and Marais, before being discovered by Louis Malle on stage in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Malle was ambitious but out of pocket, so Moreau agreed to work for him for nothing. Throughout her career, the part and the company have usually counted more than the salary. She was never paid for *La Notte* and, despite co-producing *Jules et Jim*, she claims that she received nothing for the exploitation of the film or her song 'Le tourbillon de la vie'.

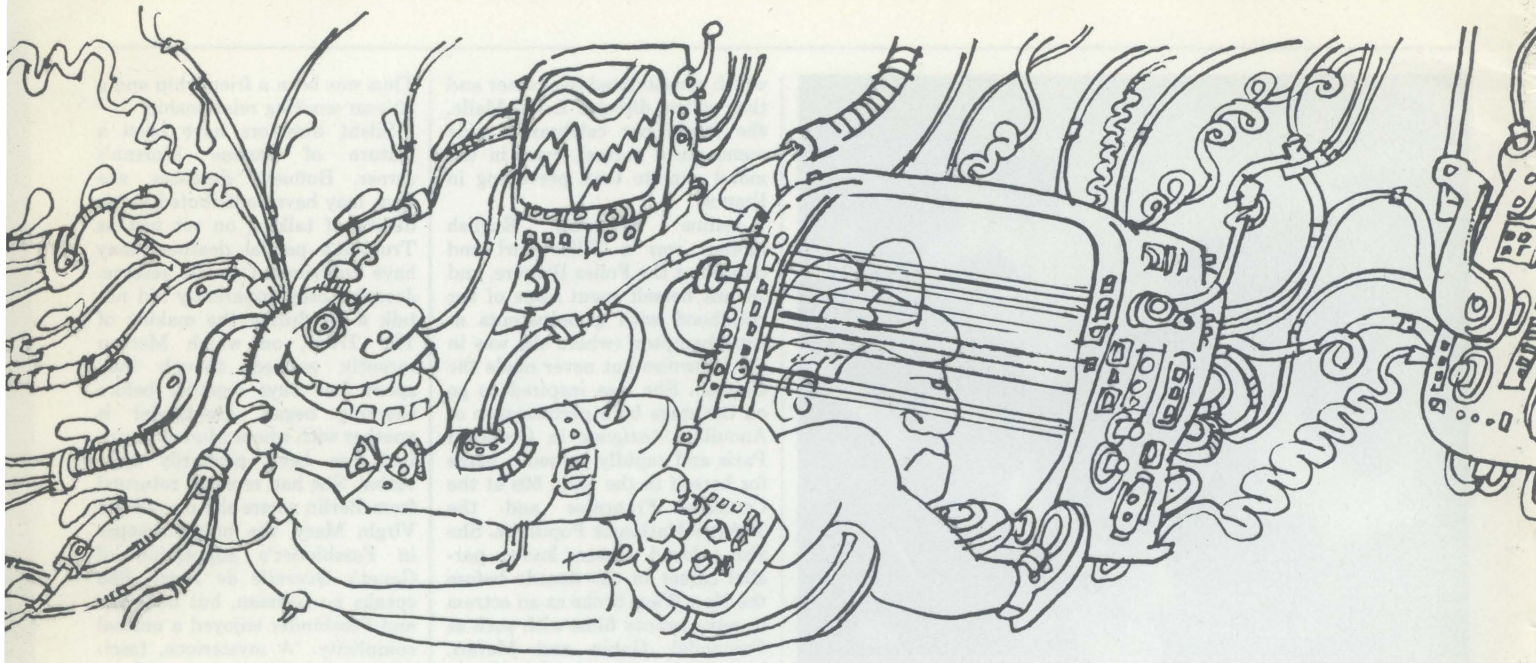
Her earlier experiences with Truffaut, for whom she had made a brief appearance in *Les 400 Coups* and who had approached her about *Jules et Jim*, were somewhat farcical. Most of their communication allegedly took place in letters which punctuated a series of fortnightly lunches in the rue Marbeuf during which the chronically shy Truffaut ordered snails and spinach and hardly said a word. After some six months, the pattern was broken. No letter arrived. Truffaut was sick; he had eaten too many snails. He was obliged to pick up the detested telephone and talk. Thus was born a friendship and a 20-year working relationship.

Silent directors have been a feature of Jeanne Moreau's career. Buñuel's deafness, she says, may have contributed to his dislike of talking on set just as Truffaut's partial deafness may have contributed to his reserve. Joseph Losey apparently did not talk a lot during the making of *The Trout*, on which Moreau recently worked, though they spent four days together before shooting began. Fassbinder is another with whom Moreau's contact has been primarily non-verbal. She had recently returned from Berlin where she played the Virgin Mary, the brothel-keeper in Fassbinder's adaptation of Genet's *Querelle de Brest*. She speaks no German, but both she and Fassbinder enjoyed a mutual complicity. 'A mysterious, fascinating experience but without words. Why not? That can be the ideal relationship.'

Her transition from actress to director, with two films completed, *Lumière* (1976) and *L'Adolescente* (1979), and another in pre-production, Jeanne Moreau judges perfectly normal. The decision to direct crystallised during a session with Orson Welles, when they were working together in 1968 on *The Immortal Story*. 'We had a drink and then two then three. I got emotional. I said, "Orson, I love you ... the next thing I want to do is direct and play in a film I have written." ' Welles said do it and several years later, she did. Her second film, which has yet to find a British distributor, is a semi-autobiographical recreation of life in a French village at the outbreak of the Second World War. The 12-year-old girl of the title falls in love with a doctor who, however, prefers her mother. 'Things would never be the same again. The sweetness of life was over.'

DON ALLEN

Laetitia Chauveau and Simone Signoret in 'L'Adolescente'.



UNUSUAL RUBBISH

BRIAN WINSTON on British cable plans and American cable experience

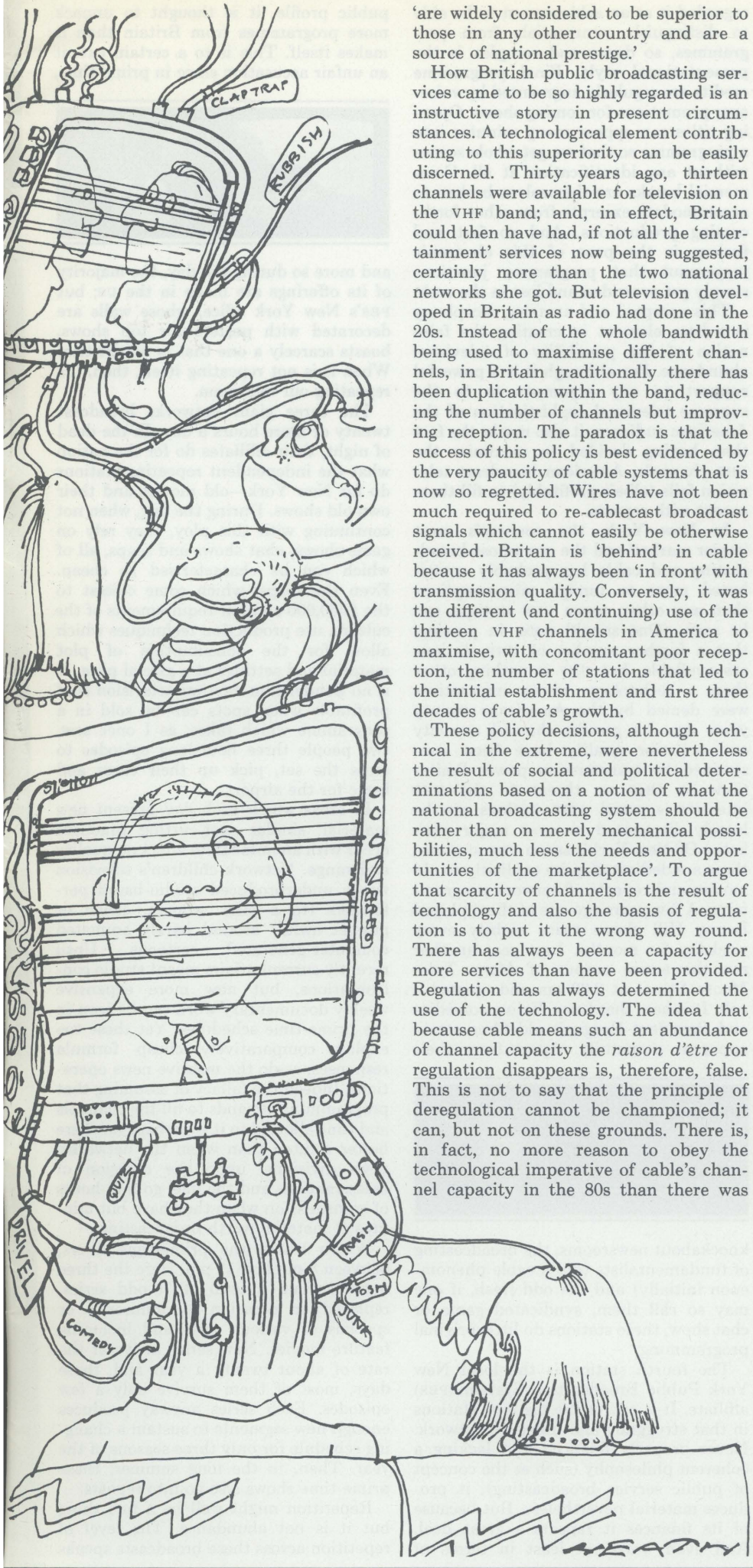
Time was, before cable television was much seen anywhere, when cynics among us used to dismiss its potential as '48 times the usual rubbish'. Now, though, as the British Government seriously contemplates spending an initial £2,500m on wiring urban Britain with a two-way (interactive) television system, some of us know better. Cable, at any rate cable in the setting of the United States (which model seems most to have influenced the Cabinet Office's Information Technology Advisory Panel), does not offer 48 times the usual rubbish at all. The rubbish it offers is quite unusual. It is unparalleled, exceptional, astonishing rubbish.

The Myth of the Technological Imperative

The Information Technology Advisory Panel was appointed in July 1981 so that, in the words of the Prime Minister's announcement, 'Government policies and actions are securely based on a close appreciation of market needs and opportunities.' The Panel's *Report on Cable Systems* was issued in February of this year. The Panel proposes fifteen to twenty-four television channels to be established on the cable, as well as a range of teletext and interactive services. These two sorts of functions should be kept apart. The rubbish I experience daily watching the third most subscribed to cable system in the US has no 'enhanced' functions.

The *Report* suggests (and this seems to have been amplified by the Press) that Britain is falling intolerably behind on both sides of this new technology. This impression is false. When *Report on Cable Systems* states: 'One of the most popular applications of cable systems in the USA is *security services*' (italics in original), it misspeaks (to use the currently fashionable Washington phrase) or, better, miswrites itself. What does the phrase 'most popular application' mean when less than 0.001 per cent of cable homes have it—a mere 16,000 out of twenty-four million? On the non-entertainment interactive front generally, there are only two commercial cable operations (both owned by the one American firm to give evidence to the Panel) with limited 'press-a-button-and-buy-a-cuckoo-clock-now' capability. There are also, as one would expect of a technology whose chief remaining problems lie in public acceptance, a number of field tests progressing, with due care and at stately academic pace, in various places. Were Britain, then, to implement so far-reaching an interactive system by the mid-80s, she would not be catching up with America, or with anybody else, but rather conducting the most expensive and extensive pioneer test of a new technology in history.

As far as the 'entertainment' potential of cable goes, Britain is indeed lagging behind in the provision of the television of abundance. The need to move beyond the twenty-year halt at a three-network system has, however, been acknowledged by the Government. The system will expand over these next years to include longer hours, a fourth channel, and, thereafter, further services to be delivered by direct broadcast satellite (DBS). The cable will absorb all this, old and new, and more than double it. It is this 'entertainment' potential which will float the cable system rather than the more experimental interactive side. That is why the Prime Minister's advisers address the issue of the effect of their scheme on the already existing 'entertainment' provisions; which, they admit,



'are widely considered to be superior to those in any other country and are a source of national prestige.'

How British public broadcasting services came to be so highly regarded is an instructive story in present circumstances. A technological element contributing to this superiority can be easily discerned. Thirty years ago, thirteen channels were available for television on the VHF band; and, in effect, Britain could then have had, if not all the 'entertainment' services now being suggested, certainly more than the two national networks she got. But television developed in Britain as radio had done in the 20s. Instead of the whole bandwidth being used to maximise different channels, in Britain traditionally there has been duplication within the band, reducing the number of channels but improving reception. The paradox is that the success of this policy is best evidenced by the very paucity of cable systems that is now so regretted. Wires have not been much required to re-cablecast broadcast signals which cannot easily be otherwise received. Britain is 'behind' in cable because it has always been 'in front' with transmission quality. Conversely, it was the different (and continuing) use of the thirteen VHF channels in America to maximise, with concomitant poor reception, the number of stations that led to the initial establishment and first three decades of cable's growth.

These policy decisions, although technical in the extreme, were nevertheless the result of social and political determinations based on a notion of what the national broadcasting system should be rather than on merely mechanical possibilities, much less 'the needs and opportunities of the marketplace'. To argue that scarcity of channels is the result of technology and also the basis of regulation is to put it the wrong way round. There has always been a capacity for more services than have been provided. Regulation has always determined the use of the technology. The idea that because cable means such an abundance of channel capacity the *raison d'être* for regulation disappears is, therefore, false. This is not to say that the principle of deregulation cannot be championed; it can, but not on these grounds. There is, in fact, no more reason to obey the technological imperative of cable's channel capacity in the 80s than there was to obey it with VHF in the 50s or UHF in the 60s.

Despite its nod to the glories of British broadcasting, the Panel is prepared, in return for offering the broadcasters the chance to resell material, accept underwriting and offer subscriptions (all in competition with new entities), to put these 'national assets which we must preserve' at considerable risk. Take the BBC. The Panel dismisses a potential increase in resistance to paying the licence fee because of a proliferation of other services, including the cable delivery of the BBC itself, which would levy charges. But should the BBC not compete in these circumstances, the *Report* notes that 'the Corporation would indeed be failing the public if its programmes appeal only to a small minority.' Thus is buried Public Service Broadcasting which enshrines a view (however unpalatable it might be to free market ideologues) that the tyranny of the ratings needs to be resisted—especially, one might now be permitted to argue from history, if pride, superiority, prestige and national assets are to characterise the broadcasting system.

With ITV the Panel is more straightforward. A proliferation of television advertising opportunities could 'reduce the audience for commercial television. ITV companies could thus be faced both with competition for TV advertising and a cut in the rates they could charge, because of reduced audiences. This could force a cut in programme expenditure and consequently a decline in the range and quality of output.' Will cable have this effect, then? The *Report* goes on: 'On the other hand the introduction of cable systems would enable far more firms to participate in TV advertising.' Balancing these considerations, it concludes: 'But it is not clear that the introduction of cable systems would necessarily have a large adverse effect on the advertising revenue base of off-air commercial TV services.'

As if aware that the above thoughts lack a certain intellectual vigour, the Panel offers the following admonition to any who might raise voices in protest: 'At every stage in the expansion of broadcasting, concern has been expressed at the possible effect on the range and quality of programmes available . . . History shows these concerns can be met.' The lessons of British broadcasting history do indeed show this quite clearly. That history also offers a contrast of the one-a-decade (or less) channel expansion traditionally practised and the wholesale increase in services now proposed. It equally draws attention to the contrast between Britain's usual regulatory caution (normally engendered as a negative response to the American experience) and the deregulated total emulation of America now proposed.

If we truly value our broadcasting system, above all for providing what some have well called 'the integrity of the national image', then there is every reason for expressing extreme concern at the *Report on Cable Systems*. This is not to deny that a good case can be made for

increasing the range of television in Britain. It is certainly not to deny that the interactive possibilities of cable, beyond television entertainment, need to be seriously examined and exploited. But as I flip through the twenty-seven channels of programming on my New York cable box I have to hand the most overwhelming evidence against the Panel's proposition that 'Market forces apply in artistic endeavours as much as in more conventional enterprises.' Much as the Prime Minister's advisers might want to believe this, the fact is that there is not enough television to fill even the limited range of offerings currently to be had, never mind the wonders of 100 or 200 channel systems.

The Myth of Abundance—The American Case

We expect certain things from our screens and these cultural expectations of what film or television should look like can be, quite crudely, expressed as a sum of money. Currently, prime-time American television, whose production values are a benchmark for the world, costs around £350,000 an hour to create. (It might be argued that such costs result because audience expectations have been artificially cultivated to these unnecessarily expensive levels so that truly democratic communications, done much more cheaply, will not be acceptable to the mass of society. By this view the radical potential of television is effectively contained and its encoding bolsters and supports the dominant political culture. A close reading of *Report on Cable Systems* nowhere reveals that democratisation of the means of audio-visual production and distribution is an aim of the Panel.)

The limits of productive capability, given the constraints of the £350,000 an hour rule (which also implies a creative element), are always largely ignored, in a rhetoric of promise and opportunity, by proponents of the television of abundance. Yet the reality of that limitation can be quite clearly seen in America, even in the pre-cable world of American VHF broadcasting.

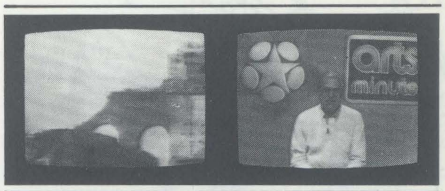
Because of decisions made after the war, VHF stations exist in goodly numbers in all major American television markets (which is how the industry describes cities). It has taken me the better part of two decades of fairly constant viewing to realise that, despite the variety, there are to all intents and purposes only four broadcast television networks in the United States, just as there are to be soon in Britain. At first sight I was utterly bamboozled by all those channels. Even more, within any one of them, I regarded it as an achievement to be able to distinguish commercials from programmes, so dense and complex is the presentational style. Final programme credits are regularly augmented by voice-over promotions for coming shows. Opening titles can appear many minutes into a programme so that we get whole scenes without any identification at all. Commercial breaks are themselves broken to accommodate excerpts from other forthcoming productions. And so fast and furious is the pace of this electronic juggernaut that programme junctions simply get overriden and lost in the rush.

This accepted and amazing cacophony is a base element in creating the false notion of the possibility of television abundance. For although it is a powerful support to any argument as to the supreme televisual sophistication of the American audience, it also masks the fact that, having decided to maximise the VHF channels, American broadcast television fails (albeit profitably) to fill them except with repeats.

In New York, the country's most 'major market' and the one whose broadcasting and cable has probably contributed more to foreign misperceptions than any other, seven VHF stations can be seen. (One should note, in passing, that a further number of UHF stations are available, but UHF is nothing other than a technology whose imperatives were denied by the Americans twenty years ago. Its greater channel capacity and superior quality have been constrained by transmission power limitations so that no threat to the VHF interests is posed. UHF stations can be largely discounted in most major markets.) Of New York's seven VHF stations, three are dedicated quite explicitly to old movies and repeats of network programming. A few years ago one of them played Benny Hill shows twice nightly every weekday for months. Last year another ran the entire corpus of *Mary Tyler Moore Shows* at 2.30 am and created a cult. It is here that Lucy, Ealing comedies and President Reagan's old films attain apparent perpetuity. Apart from their

knockabout newsrooms, the broadcasting of fundamentalists (*not* a cable phenomenon initially) and the odd fresh, if one may so call them, syndicated game or chat show, these stations do little original programming.

The fourth station is the local New York Public Broadcasting System (PBS) affiliate. It is one of the big four stations in that struggling and unhappy network. Never properly financed and lacking a coherent philosophy (such as the concept of public service broadcasting), it produces material nevertheless. But because of its finances it repeats a great deal. And even worse, at least in terms of public profile, it is thought to unpack more programmes from Britain than it makes itself. This is to a certain extent an unfair accusation since in prime-time,



and more so during the day, the majority of its offerings are made in the US; but PBS's New York office, whose walls are decorated with posters for top shows, boasts scarcely a one that is not British. When it is not repeating itself, then, it's repeating our television.

The three giant networks broadcast twenty or more hours a day. In the dead of night, their affiliates do for the nation what the independent repeating stations do for New York—old movies and their own old shows. During the day, when not continuing with this ploy, they rely on game shows, chat shows and soaps, all of which can be characterised as cheap. Even the soaps, which come closest to the £350,000 an hour requirements of the culture, use production techniques which allow for the consumption of plot material and settings at a glacial pace. It is no wonder that daytime television is so profitable when spots can be sold in a programme which takes, as I once saw, two people three hour-long episodes to cross the set, pick up their cases and leave for the airport.

In areas which each day present new material, similar cost-cutting practices occur with an immediate effect on quality and range. Network children's television wraps underproduced studio-based performers (to a man, woman, clown or puppet awful) around barely animated computer-generated cartoons. Until recently current affairs meant studio confrontations, but now more expensive weekly documentary work can be seen in the prime-time schedules. Yet these too exploit comparatively cheap formula responses, as do the massive news operations. Indeed the fallacy of assuming that programming expands to fill the channels and time allotted to it is perhaps nowhere better refuted than when the networks' news divisions, upon the occasion of assassinations and the like, go into hours of transmission when they have but minutes of material worth broadcasting.

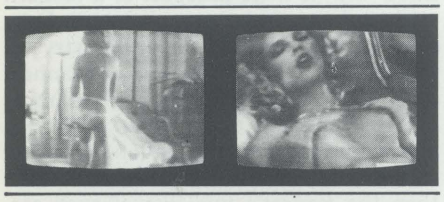
Which leaves the prime-time hours, between 8 pm and 11 pm. Here the three networks run a total of 70-odd series, replaced on occasion by miniseries or specials of various sorts and including feature movies. New series arrive at the rate of about twenty a year and, these days, most of them survive only a few episodes. Each series anyway produces enough new segments to sustain a changing schedule for only three seasons of the year. Then, in the long summer, these prime-time shows also go into repeats.

Repetition might well be a fine thing but it is not abundance. The level of repetition across these broadcasts speaks

most eloquently to the £350,000 rule. One can conclude that the difference between British and American television lies exactly in the fact that Britain, with a quarter of America's population, attempts about the same amount of prime-time £350,000 production, as it were, and displays it within a system more appropriately designed to contain it. It is not that there is more television in America; it is just spread more thinly.

So thinly is it spread, in various ways, that cable television could find subscribers looking for the many things American broadcasting did not offer them. The gaps exist not because broadcasting lacked channel capacity to offer variety but rather because the pressure of the market forced it into homogeneity. Thus cable has become in these last seven years one of the few good entrepreneurial deeds in an otherwise naughty world.

The heart of the cable industry's success is the recent Hollywood feature film, a product no more created by it than were the broadcast programmes whose retransmission constituted its original and still prime function. The selling point was that these films were uninterrupted by commercials; which, given the level of interruption, the style of it and the scarcity of stations not having such interruption, made this a particularly desirable feature. Every other cable home in America, twelve million in all, subscribes to an extra pay service most of which offer recent movies as their main

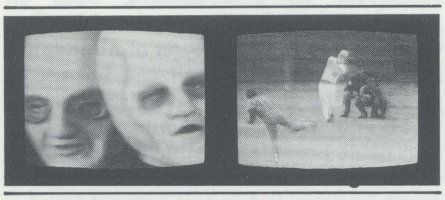


attraction. This adds up to £36m a month in revenues, above and beyond the monies taken for the basic cable service. This money is the single most attractive fact about cable, the cream. But the revenue can be just as easily seen as a vote against the constant commercial cacophony of American broadcasting rather than an endorsement of the new technology.

Along the same lines as the movies, there are other saleable cable services. There is an appetite for more sport, especially, for instance, any game played by a local team. These events were covered by television before cable but now the owners of the teams can get a better deal for themselves, often producing their own coverage, than they could from the broadcasters. There is also an appetite for softcore porno movies. The smarter producers of such have for some time been making a version—nude but lacking 'insertions'—for cable use.

There can be no question that, even with only twenty-eight per cent of all television-owning households wired and only half of those taking 'pay' services, an impact is being felt by broadcasters. In such households less network television is being watched. And the fact that a sizeable minority has already seen any movies the networks might care to run, months if not years in advance, is removing those movies from the schedule. As the cable base expands, local agreements for sporting events are giving way to national ones. The cable industry boasts that it is only a matter of time before it will be able to outbid the broadcasters for the Olympic Games (which will then, of course, be available only to subscribers). Of course broadcasters have no prescriptive rights here—that is not the point. It is rather that the three proven areas of cable television are creating almost no new material. It all comes from somewhere else.

There are five competing movie channels all sharing a finite number of feature



films. Even when 'pay-cable' reaches the projected levels outlined for it by the industry, it will still barely generate enough revenue each month to cover at full cost its film production needs. There will still be a finite number of feature films, made essentially for world-wide theatrical release, for it to use. Now, and for the foreseeable future, this means that in any given month these services offer around fifty per cent identical product—over six months they played *Rocky II* 44 times, *The Muppet Movie* 37 times, *. . . And Justice For All* 39 times, *Close Encounters* 41 times and *Superman* 53 times. The only way to have people subscribe to more than one of these services is almost to give it away in a two-for-the-price-of-one deal. Most subscribers are anyway not offered more than one movie channel because of corporate considerations (whereby my operator will only offer his own movie service and not those of rival operators) or because of channel limitations (whereby three-quarters of all American cable systems only have twelve channels).

Superman's fifty-three appearances on three channels were caused by programme repetition within each channel at an unprecedented scale. It can be argued that Home Box Office (the giant among the movie channels) made its major discovery not in 1975, when it first demonstrated that the satellite could link cable systems together to recreate a national audience, but earlier, when it was still 'bicycling' shows between systems and found that six or eight screenings of the same film during a month were perceived by subscribers as a 'convenience'.

This 'convenience principle', although it says nothing for notions of abundance, is indeed a major contribution to television, for if it were to be generally adopted the gaiety of nations might be much increased by the curtailment of programmes and a rise in overall quality. But, it must be reported, that is not the case with current American movie channels. As they cast about to fill out their schedules beyond the blockbuster features, they show programmes which would disgrace a network—tax-shelter unreleased (and unreleasable) films; documentaries largely distinguished by what one journalist refers to as 'corporate tit'; outside broadcasts of Broadway shows; and concerts, sports and other events of no particular originality or worth. The price I pay for being able to watch *Kramer vs Kramer* on the small screen within a year of its release is really quite high.

And this is from the most viable, richest services. There are twenty-five or so others on offer to cable operators working in very much cloudier economic circumstances: 24-hour news operations; 24-hour weathermen; cultural channels (by which is meant, somewhat ironically one could claim, British television plus foreign films [cheap!] and more cheaply shot outside broadcasts of music, opera and dance); 'women's' services; ethnic and religious programming, and one showing nothing but rock 'n' roll film clips. There are over thirty more of these planned, although 'planning' in this context might not mean much. Last year nearly twenty services were announced but only two got going. Even cable's most ardent enthusiasts admit that not all these will survive.

Were it not for the availability of cheap programming from the world's entire audio-visual archive (from 1895 to the present), one could guess that America would not have to put up with so many services now. If the rich movie subscription channels provide poor programming, what the others show borders on the abysmal. One 24-hour news service always seems to be doing gardening segments when I flip to it. Another service mixes student movies and terrible Canadian current affairs magazines with sports events and old *Coronation Street*s. There is a seemingly never-ending series of 50s variety acts from the Paris Olympia. And when it comes to filler material, oh BBC potter thou shouldst be potting at this hour.

Cable television is a carpet-bagging industry. It began by stealing broadcasters' signals and, since even in 'pay-cable' homes most of the time it is still the networks that are watched, it continues to do this. For its own programming it is endeavouring to purloin everybody's archive. *Variety* calculates that the BBC's arrangement with The Entertainment Channel will access that most valuable of all archives for under £10,000 per programme hour. Cable rights sell for tens and hundreds of dollars per minute

A selection of Manhattan's abundance.

Column 1: *Coca Crystal's drug phone-in show—how to roll a joint.*

2: VHF *repeat stations*—WP1X VHF 11; *Benny Hill on* WOR *Channel 9.*

3: *Channel 10 (Manhattan Cable's own) film on Roman architecture—unusual rubbish to a* T; *culture on* ABC.

4: *60s nudie film on Robin Byrd's dirty talk and phone-in show.*

5: CBS *culture; sport on* CNN *(Cable News Network).*

rather than the thousands the programme actually cost to make. The cable industry boom is quite crucially based on its not paying for real production costs. The result is the panoply of amazing rubbish that is the basic cable service. Of course, being indiscriminate scavengers, cablers occasionally show welcome material, but I wonder if Washington, even in the grip of deregulation, would remain quiescent once it realised that Time-Life via its Manhattan cable system regularly screens *Ten Days That Shook the World*? In fact, given the level of presentation at Manhattan Cable Inc (where the weather machine shows 124° for days on end and the Reuters teletext feed is inserted into a movie screening for a period of minutes), one can ask if they know what *Ten Days That Shook the World* is themselves?

None of this is amateur 'access' programming, for these are services being run ostensibly by professionals and certainly for profit. Local access channels exist because a number of Americans have struggled hard and long to preserve what they see as cable's potential to counteract urban alienation. These activists have argued that by making the local political process more accessible and opening up a means of communication to those normally denied media access cable could become a radical social device. So well have they done their work that every municipality in the land knows that when it is approached for a licence access services can be demanded from the cable company.

But the cable industry is surviving this threat of municipally imposed social responsibility. It simple ignores many of the provisions signed into cable agreements. In New York, for instance, Time-Life's subsidiary has not provided the service to schools, firehouses and police stations that it legally bound itself to do. It has started to sell teletext classified advertisement space on channels that are supposed, by its agreement with the city, to be reserved on a 'first come, first served' basis to all comers. These 'all comers' have also done their bit for the suppression of cable's radical potential. While it is true that often the only positive image of, say, minorities is to be had from the programmes they themselves mount on these channels, it is equally true that access largely means a parade of egomaniacs poorly mimicking Michael Parkinson; yet more excruciating is the sight of a solitary figure taking telephone calls on camera—an access cable speciality.

Conditions have to be met before access can operate effectively. There must be a real community, with an extensive cable system and an operator who cares enough to provide the wherewithal, in people and machines, to produce meaningful material. This has been done in some small places, where the cable studio is the council chamber and informative popular work has happened. These are exceptions. In New York, more typically, access is, even with a considerable amount of goodwill, unwatchable. There is a further channel available on Manhattan Cable where time can be cheaply bought (not demanded as on the access channels). It carries *Midnight Blue* and *Ugly George*, whose production standards are so in line with the rest of cable's output as to render them unwatchable too, with or without goodwill.

Enriching the Cable Companies

The marketplace, at least as far as these artistic endeavours are concerned, clearly does not operate too well. The £350,000-an-hour rule works instead as a real constraint on programming both on American broadcasting and cable. But the fallacy of the television of abundance is innocent enough until the impact of proliferating channels on existing structures is examined. It could be argued that cable provides terrible programming in America (which I must insist that it does) because it has not yet achieved a sufficient audience base to justify real production costs. It can be just as well argued, however, that even when it does achieve such penetration it is, in the nature of the case, a more fragmented system doomed, therefore, never to be able to obey the £350,000-an-hour rule.

In the words of the head of PBS (certainly an interested party but no more so, it seems to me, than the Prime Minister's advisers): 'In the future, when every community will have dozens or even hundreds of channels, TV audiences will be so fragmentised that commercial broadcasters will no longer be able to afford *any* major drama, quality children's programmes, original performing arts, significant public affairs, documentaries, or serious educational programming.' All parties in America seem to be agreed that cable could well destroy the networks (and many might say that never have those who lived by the sword more appropriately died by it). But should they disappear, cable would have to provide all those hours of programming which their subscribers still want and get from the recablecasting of broadcast signals. They will never be able to afford it.

One can dispute the Information Technology Advisory Panel's central view of cable: 'The principal driving force for the growth of cable in other countries has been the extra choice of programmes available.' While this certainly applies to Canada, Belgium, Holland and the like, where a neighbouring nation's television is considered more attractive than the home-grown variety, it is not true of America. Seventeen per cent of the United States was wired before HBO began satellite transmissions in 1976. The best estimate of cable's growth (the industry's own) suggests that even in 1990 a quarter of all subscribers will buy only basic—and basic arguably means only improved reception of broadcast signals. Forty-eight per cent of people who had refused to buy cable said in a survey last year that they got good enough reception already. Reception was and still is an important factor, a factor not properly acknowledged by the *Report on Cable Systems*' remark that, in addition to choice, 'poor reception of conventional transmissions has contributed (for example, in American towns away from major cities).' About a quarter of the country barely gets television and a further huge area gets signals of such poor quality that one would readily pay money to improve them. Poor reception, because of geography and architecture as well as an old-fashioned system for colour and bad VHF quality, has made the cable ground fertile for trenching.

Of course, if this is acknowledged then there is little reason to cable Britain, even to receive French television. If it is simply a matter of increasing choice, then choice is about to be increased by other, perhaps more suitable means. The requirements of the deaf can be covered by a caption system compatible with existing broadcasting. Local television on a town-by-town basis can be delivered with low-power transmitters. And the extra 'entertainment' services can and will be provided on the Direct Broadcast Satellite which the Government expects to be operational by 1986.

All this is well understood by the Information Technology Advisory Panel. The DBS 'implies' according to the *Report*, 'that planning for new cable services should start no later than 1983, and preferably earlier.' Indeed if the ball is not rolling before the 1984 election there 'will be little prospect of a modern cable industry being established in Britain.' If by 'modern cable industry' is meant what I get via my box in Manhattan, let none regret Britain's passing it up. If a 'modern cable industry' means services not potentially available by other means (i.e. low-power, teletext, DBS, etc), then the *Report*'s final list of such services should reveal whether or not they are worth an initial £2,500 million and £1,000 million 'annually': 'fire and burglar alarms', 'control of heating systems', 'remote meter reading', 'shopping, banking, betting, etc, from home', 'opinion polling', 'videogames', 'electronic mail/messagering'. Curbing my desire to add the telephone and an efficient mail service to the list of alternative technologies available, I shall simply ask if any of these wonders are worth a long or short term risk to our broadcasting institutions?

We have never thought so: 'But the biggest threat to the present concept of the mass audience . . . is undoubtedly cable . . . Cable is bound to give the viewer an increase in the choice of programmes at any given time and will therefore erode audience figures for any *one* programme. But it need not necessarily increase the *range* of new programming available to the public . . . The audience is not necessarily enriched even if the cable company is' (italics in original). Thus the Annan Report as long ago as March 1977. If things have changed, *Report on Cable Systems* does not mention them. That is because things have not changed. My Lord Annan's opinion is incontrovertible. ■

Breathing a little harder than usual

NICK RODDICK on the signs of British mettle

There are times—now is one of them—when it is possible to write about 'the British film industry' without feeling that one is conducting an autopsy. Even so, it is difficult to avoid the language of pathology, not only because it is far simpler to see what went wrong than it is to say what should be done, but also because there are any number of people, inside the industry and out, to tell you that it's been dead for years anyway. The exact moment of death is hard to pin down, but it is usually 'about ten years ago'. And in ten years time we shall probably be looking back to 1982 with a gleeful regret. Nostalgia about past failures is a particularly English characteristic: as a nation, we reserve a special affection for those things which, like the railway system and the corner shop, we were most ready to junk. The film industry is one of them.

On 23 March this year—Oscar night—the corpse gave one of its most spectacular twitches in years: indeed, it all but sat up. *Chariots of Fire* won the Oscar for Best Picture—the first British film to do so since *Oliver!* and the first British film ever to do so in twentieth century clothes. There was, of course, no shortage of people to tell us those clothes weren't very British: in financial terms, with 50 per cent Egyptian, 50 per cent American backing, *Chariots of Fire* was at best wearing Union Jack underpants. But all the same, national euphoria reigned for all of 48 hours: David Puttnam became a superstar, the Vangelis theme music entered the Top Twenty, and *News at 5.45* played out to shots of young men in baggy white shorts splashing along the beach at Broadstairs.

The most interesting aspect of the euphoria was the fact that Colin Welland's well-judged piece of emotional rhetoric, 'The British are coming!', was widely assumed to be a knowledgeable statement of fact by a well-informed insider. But was it? In the month following the Oscar ceremony, I talked to a number of people who are, in one way or another, part of the British film industry. They are not necessarily representative and the survey was far from complete: whom I talked to depended very much on who was available. The original idea was to find out whether the Oscars would make any immediate tangible difference to filmgoing or film production in this country. As far as filmgoing is concerned, the short-term answer may be yes, at

David Puttnam, Hugh Hudson.

least for *Chariots of Fire*: the re-release is doing great business (and, interestingly enough, the *Chariots of Fire/Gregory's Girl* double bill is doing better than the coupling with *Breaking Away*). But the impact on British film production is much less certain. The answer to the question 'Would it make any difference' varied from a hope that 'Americans financing films in England may perhaps not refuse to back films which are indigenous to Britain' (Leon Clore) to Alan Parker's 'sadly none at all'.

So the balance of the inquiry shifted towards attempting to determine whether, if the British were not actually coming, they might at least be breathing a little harder than usual. I talked mainly to producers involved in smaller-scale production, though I did also speak to one or two directors whose work has been in what one might call the quality end of commercial film-making. I didn't talk to companies like Brent Walker (*The Bitch, The Stud*) who have worked mainly at the exploitation end of the market, though I don't want to dismiss their contribution to the film 'industry': as Simon Perry, head of the Development Fund at the National Film Finance Corporation, put it, 'where there's footage there's hope', and Brent Walker certainly produce footage.

The first thing that needs to be said is that it is all a question of criteria: pedantic as it may sound, any discussion of the British film industry depends on what one means by 'British', what one means by 'film' and what one means by 'industry'. Given the specifics—economic and cultural—of film production in Britain, the first question is more or less unanswerable: British cinema remains a state of mind. Leon Clore repeatedly used the word 'indigenous' to define the kind of films he wanted to (and, with *Morgan*, did) produce, but I suspect he also meant modern. In which case, *Eye of the Needle* is just as British as *Chariots of Fire*. And neither is British financed. If one relies on the criterion of what qualifies for Eady, *Superman 2, Flash Gordon, The Shining* and *Tess* are all British films. Short of the kind of Government commitment to national film-making like that made in Australia over the past decade—by unanimous consent unthinkable in the present British context—that is unlikely to change.

What one means by 'British' inevitably shades over into what one means by 'industry'. If one means something which provides stable employment conditions for a large number of people and an optimal use of production facilities, then there is nothing much wrong with the British film industry. In addition to the technically British blockbusters listed above, films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the *Star Wars* trilogy and *Reds* were all massive employers and facility users. This should provide the infrastructure necessary for a more indigenous kind of British film production. But it doesn't. The main reason, of course, is money. In a month, I didn't hear a single good word about British financial institutions when it came to providing production finance.

What I did hear went like this. 'The thing about *Reds* that makes me slightly upset is that Paramount Pictures got this huge leasing arrangement with Barclays Mercantile Bank for $100 million. Now, I can imagine if I went along to Barclays Bank—not that I ever have—and said, "Hey, you guys, give me a million dollars for a movie," they'd give me a quick kick in the arse and show me to the door. Maybe I'm being unfair to Barclays Bank, but it seems a great pity that they're prepared to make money out of the film business by getting involved with American majors on tax deals and they're not prepared to do anything here: as far as I know, they've never financed a British film. And there you have the root of the English malaise. I've been doing things for 21 years. I've made a great deal of money, both in theatre and in films, for other people, but I've *never* been approached by anybody in Britain—I've been approached by Americans—with a view to financing anything' (Michael White). (As a footnote, the loophole that enabled Barclays to do the *Reds* deal was closed by this year's budget.) Words like 'pathetic' (Richard Attenborough) recur in conversations about British financial houses when it comes to film-making. According to Alan Parker, whose own company has put together the packages for all his recent films, 'there's no courage in this country, no financial courage: that's the great flaw.'

The cowardice of British financial institutions is perhaps understandable, at any rate in the short term. It is virtually impossible for a film to recoup its investment on the British market, least of all now that cinema admissions have finally crashed down through the 100 million floor. The biggest grossing picture in Britain in 1980–1981 (*Variety*, 13 January 1982) was *Superman 2*, with a box-office figure of just over £2½m. Even *Gregory's Girl*, which cost only £200,000, did not bring in more than £138,375 over the same period (though it is by now in profit). According to Colin Dunn of Handmade Films, *The Long Good Friday*, another lowish budget picture, came close to breaking even on the British market, 'but not close enough: you've really got to go some with this territory for a film to be viable.'

If a film costs more than $2m—and there are few that don't—the home market alone hasn't a hope. According to Leon Clore, 'you have to break the American market if your film cost anything.' To break the American market—as Clore did with *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which had done some $7½m worth of business there by the time *Variety* drew up its annual figures—you have to spend more. And that involves doing some kind of advance deal with an American distributor, which in effect means an American major: only four films in this year's American box-office top fifty were distributed by

anyone other than a major (three by Embassy, the other by New World). The natural tendency is to involve the major in the project from the start: as Clore says, 'I suspect that unless a major has a direct financial interest in a film, it's very difficult to get him to distribute it. He's got enough problems of his own.'

So, at £1m and over, British films become American, and British producers habitually talk in dollars. It is, of course, a vicious circle: American money has been used to finance the most profitable British-made films; British funds have been called on when that money is not available, which has often meant that they have ended up in projects which have not been profitable. When the NFFC is called upon to help finance a film, it is almost by definition because no one else will, which goes against their own terms of reference—to back films which have a 'reasonable' chance of commercial success. There is no British film industry because there is no financial courage, but there is no financial courage because there is no British film industry. The lack of continuity in production means that the kind of losses on individual films which American majors can offset against the profits on an overall slate of pictures, cannot be absorbed by the British industry. As Michael White puts it, 'you can't do anything on one.'

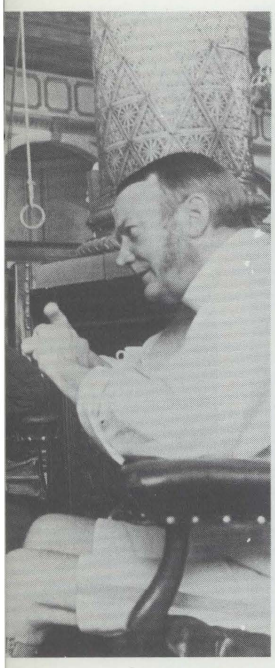
If no one else is committed to the idea of a British film industry, it is hard to see why film-makers should be. The Government certainly doesn't care and there seems little prospect of change—'not as long,' says White, 'as politicians on both sides of the House are so totally uninterested in the arts. They pay lip service to them. They go to the opening of the Barbican, or the Royal Variety Show, or the Royal Film Premiere, and that's it. People who are politically minded always feel that the arts are something they have to pay lip service to but are really a bit of a waste of time.' Even the notion of lip service doesn't exist when it comes to filmgoers. On the one hand the British public seems almost definitively to have lost the habit of cinemagoing: Britain has the lowest per capita cinema admissions in Europe (resulting, on the London Transport model, in some of the highest prices and the worst services). On the other hand, those people who are cinemagoers—which presumably includes anybody reading this article, *hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*—are not decisively influenced by the national origin of the film: who, reading this, can honestly say that they make a particular effort to see a film just because it is British?

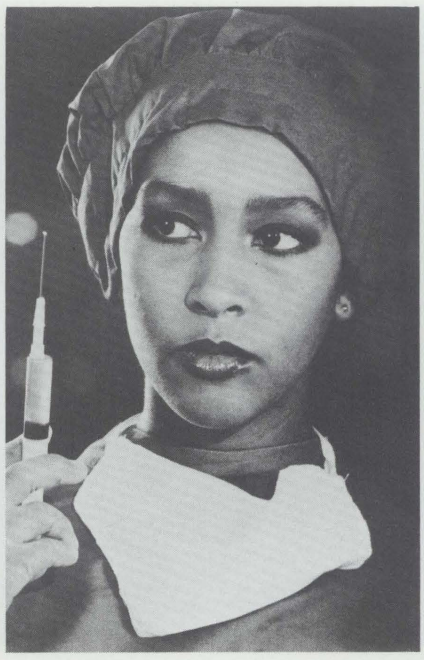
The most depressing thing about the torpor of the British film industry is that the reasons for it are crystal clear: no continuity, no money, no audiences—three chickens with not an egg between them. American audiences may be parochial, but it is the largest parish in the world, and can sustain a very large scale of film-making. The problem is that British audiences aren't even parochial. If anything, they are just the opposite: they believe (with some justification and a lot of historical precedent) that films from elsewhere—especially America—are liable to be more entertaining and more dynamic than the homegrown product. With admission prices of £2 and over, a sense of commitment to an infrequent supply of less entertaining product is hard to maintain. In short, there is no earthly reason why there should be a British film industry at all. It is not profitable. We don't need it for British audiences to be able to see films in their own language. ('If the United States spoke Spanish,' says Clore, 'there would be a British film industry.') And we have a television system which effectively fills the need that led to the setting up of a body like the Australian Film Commission: with the very healthy state of foreign television sales, we don't need theatrical films to create a strong British image abroad, with all the possible visible and invisible exports that such an image may generate.

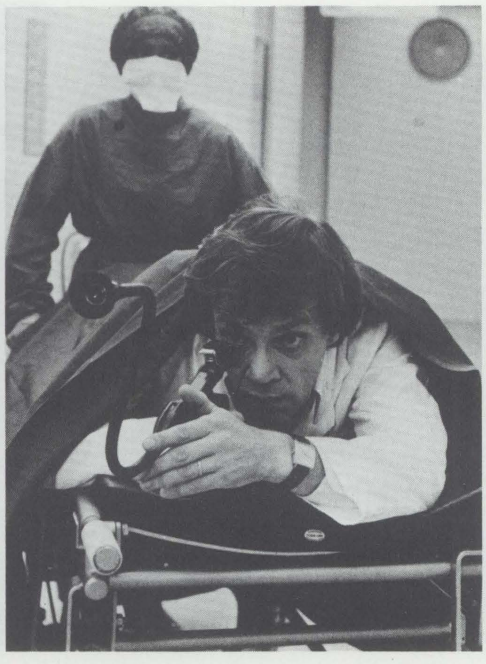
The extraordinary thing, in fact, is that there is any British film production at all. But there is, and it is the result of efforts by people far more committed to British film production than most of those (*hypocrite lecteur*, etc) who are constantly sniping at them for what they are doing or for not doing more. Brigid Brophy begins an article on 'The Economics of Self-Censorship' in the current issue of *Granta* with the words 'Which would you rather be, good or published? That is the dilemma that the "crisis in publishing" has begun to press on British writers.' It is not a dilemma that is going to seem very new to British film producers.

Individual commitment to British film production is not, of course, altruistic: there are profits to be made, maybe not on the scale associated in the public imagination with the movie business, but substantial ones none the less. None of the producers I spoke to gave the impression of being on the breadline (which is scarcely surprising: a producer who gives the impression of being broke isn't going to be a producer for long). But they are all aware of the need for British film production, and aware that that need is as much economic as it is cultural. Economically, such production is the only sure guarantee of the continuation of *any* kind of British film industry. The readiness of American majors to put money into the production of transatlantic films like *Superman 2* and *Reds* in this country is quite capable of evaporating more or less overnight, as it did in the early 70s: the American film industry is a business like any other, and its commitment is to low(er) costs, not Britain.

If film production is to continue in Britain without the present American production capital, it is likely to follow one or more of the four current (and overlapping) models. The first, and by far the most desirable, is virtually unique in terms of the British film industry over the past couple of decades: that of Handmade Films. Handmade, which came into







From left: Chrissie Cotterill, Amanda York in 'Scrubbers'; Mai Zetterling.

Richard Loncraine directs Michael Palin and Denholm Elliott in 'The Missionary'.

'Britannia Hospital': Marsha Hunt, Malcolm McDowell.

existence when George Harrison acquired *Life of Brian* after the original backer, Bernard Delfont, read the script, is both a production and a distribution company, although it has been far more successful with its own films than with those (*The Burning, Tattoo* and *Chanel Solitaire*) it has acquired for British distribution. The profits from *Brian* and *Time Bandits*—which grossed $16m in the US in 1981, eight times the 1981 gross of *Chariots of Fire* (though the latter is now reckoned to have grossed some $8m)—have been ploughed back into production.

Handmade currently has $8m tied up in three films: *Scrubbers*, about a girls' Borstal, directed by Mai Zetterling ('a sort of female *Scum*,' says Colin Dunn), the Michael Palin comedy *The Missionary* and John Cleese in *Privates on Parade*. Obviously the Python connection is strong, but not all-pervasive: neither *The Long Good Friday* nor *Scrubbers* is even remotely connected with the Python team. In a sense, of course, Handmade simply struck lucky with its first wave of production, but the fact that the current production programme is being made entirely with its own money and is 'basically a commitment to British film production' makes Handmade one of the most welcome phenomena of recent years. The only other production-distribution company like it is Brent Walker, and their commitment, until their recent salvaging of *Return of the Soldier*, is to a very different kind of market.

The second model is the most usual one: the financing of production through distribution deals with one of the American majors. The money is rarely British, but the films, like *Chariots of Fire* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, are. David Puttnam is the most spectacular success story here. '*Chariots of Fire* is a result of fifteen years' work by an incredibly unusual and remarkable individual,' says Alan Parker. 'Puttnam is the one who made that film work, and he isn't a film industry.' He owes his success, like most producers, to being what *Chariots* director Hugh Hudson calls a 'great before and after man', setting up a project and publicising the product. But he isn't alone. Other producers working in this way include Leon Clore, Michael White (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Jabberwocky, The Hound of the Baskervilles, Rude Boy, Shock Treatment, Polyester, Urgh! A Music War* and *My Dinner with André*), and the team of Clive Parsons and Davina Belling (*Inserts, That Summer, Scum, Breaking Glass, Gregory's Girl* and *Britannia Hospital*). Here, the process is not so much handmade as hand-to-mouth ('How do you approach potential backers?' I asked Michael White. 'I crawl.'), but there is none the less a form of continuity, even if the films do not always meet Clore's criterion for a British film: films 'that could not be made anywhere else' (*Polyester* a British film?).

The third model is that of subsidised production, whether on the more or less artisanal scale of the BFI Production Board (not to mention the pure artisanship of films funded, generally for £10,000 or less, by Regional Arts Associations), or on the more commercial scale of the films in which the NFFC has been involved. The films in which the NFFC has had a stake since Mamoun Hassan's arrival there in late 1978—generally a production loan of not less than 40 per cent which buys the Corporation a share in the equity—have been *Babylon, Gregory's Girl, Memoirs of a Survivor, An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* and *Britannia Hospital.*

That the NFFC, with its paltry allocation from the Eady fund of £1·5m a year, can fulfil a very real function is demonstrated by the history of Jerzy Skolimowski's *Moonlighting* (formerly *Blackout*). The idea evolved over Christmas, prompted by events in Poland. It tells the story of four Poles working in London. Only one of them speaks English, and he withholds the news of the military takeover back home from the other three, keeping them shut up in a house in Kensington which they are decorating for a rich Warsaw businessman. The treatment arrived at the NFFC just after the New Year. Development money was put up, and ten days later a final screenplay arrived (produced, says Simon Perry, 'mainly by four Poles shut up in a house by Jerzy Skolimowski until they had finished it'). Production money was raised from Channel 4 and from Michael White. (Ironically, although the NFFC put up development money, it turned down the project for production financing.) Shooting was due to start on 15 February but actually started on the 12th because there seemed no point in hanging around and because the main actor, Jeremy Irons, had to be off the picture by 15 March. Five weeks after that a rough cut was seen by Gilles Jacob and the finished film was in competition at Cannes. Four-and-a-half months from first inkling to Cannes is obviously exceptional, but it does say something for the NFFC and for the available mechanisms of independent production in this country (as well, of course, as for Jerzy Skolimowski).

The final model is still on the drawing board, or so recently off it that it is difficult to know how it will work out: funding from Channel 4 (and to a lesser extent from other video medium sources, including possibly the BBC, which is rumoured to be thinking of replacing its 'seed money' system with a direct financing commitment). The advantages of this kind of production finance, already tried out successfully in a slightly different form in Italy and Germany (and long hoped for in Britain), are obvious. The advance purchase of TV rights ensures the film a known return—£300,000 in the case of the picture Simon Perry is leaving the NFDF to produce; and since it is not a loan, the film goes into profit as soon as the balance of the cost (£200,000 in Perry's case) has been recouped. There are obviously disadvantages as well: a TV screening necessarily limits the film's

theatrical potential, and Clive Parsons for one is extremely wary of it. 'We would have been in terrible shape if we'd done *Gregory's Girl* with Channel 4.'

But, as the trend towards home video gathers momentum, it is hardly pessimistic to envisage a situation in ten years time where cinemas will only exist in London and major provincial centres as showcases for future video product, available to those who want to see films sooner, on a larger screen, with a better quality image and with the benefit of an audience. The cinema has survived other equally fundamental alterations to what everyone had always thought of as its nature, and there is not a prior reason why it should not adapt to this development (if it occurs). 'Theatrical is useful,' says Perry: 'it makes the film a little event.' A five-week run at the Gate may do little more than cover the cost of prints and advertising, but it has other, less tangible advantages. It makes it a 'grown-up' movie (as yet, video shows little sign of being able to generate its own market without the 'event' of theatrical release) and pushes up the sale price to video and TV, at home and abroad. 'Success in the cinema is what makes people want to see it on TV and on video,' says Clore. Producers have ceased to view TV as the major enemy of cinema: that romantic notion is now largely the province of critics.

What, then, are the conclusions to be drawn from all this? First, the old-style movies—what Barry Spikings of EMI calls 'event' movies—will continue to be made, with American finance and American distribution deals. But there will be fewer of them and their continued existence will depend on the state of the American market: they are, and always have been, beyond our control. In Hollywood, says Michael Apted, old habits die hard: a proposal to make a relatively cheap ($6–8m) movie is still likely to be met with the phrase 'Bring me a star and I'll make it.' In which case, the production cost is likely to double and the chances of it being made in Britain grow proportionally less. For Apted, 'it seems remote that I'd ever get the chance to make another feature film here' (though he is currently working on a TV movie, produced by David Puttnam).

Secondly, British film-makers like John Schlesinger, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, Peter Yates, Michael Apted and Alan Parker will continue to work in Hollywood, a place whose relationship to British directors remains, to adapt Leslie Fiedler's classic analysis of American literature, that of a grandmother and a whore. We may regret the fact, but we can't afford to be too moralistic about it. Film-makers are people who make films, and films being what they are, they make them where they can. Besides, no one has yet suggested that Graham Greene is not a British novelist because he lives and works in the South of France and writes novels about Africa, Latin America and South-East Asia. Alan Parker regards himself as a British film-maker who goes on location, not a permanent emigrant. 'I've never left here. My offices are at Pinewood and I live in Richmond. It's just that, in order to do my job, I have to go on location.' David Hemmings, once the bright young hope of British cinema, whose production activities are now exclusively based in California and Australasia, is determined that Colin Welland has got his tense wrong: the British aren't coming, they've been there for years, working in—and, if one is to go by the periodic gripings in the American trade press, dominating—the American film industry.

Finally, cinema will survive in Britain. It's nice to be able to say something like that positively. The present production climate in Britain, with Channel 4, *Chariots of Fire* and the impressive track record of producers like Puttnam, White, and Parsons and Belling, points the way towards more sensibly budgeted movies. The combined effect of *Chariots of Fire*'s success and *Heaven's Gate*'s failure has finally prompted a change of perspective which can only benefit British film production. The cost of 'event' movies has gone through the roof (with no accompanying guarantee of success), partly because of the surprisingly inflexible business practices of the American majors now that they are controlled by the conglomerates, partly because of the rates that crews have come to expect from commercials (the recent prize-winning Watneys ad cost £2,000 a second). 'I don't blame the unions at all,' says Perry, 'but in a sense there was a killing of the goose.' The crisis that this produced has forced film-makers to think in terms of movies costing around $1m, which can feasibly be financed independently. 'At that price,' says Michael White, 'you can get money from a circle of investors with some possibility of a return.' And at that price, producers can make indigenous movies—movies that deal with an area they know and are made basically for a market with which they are familiar. Producers, in other words, can make movies they care about. 'I just think,' says Perry, 'it's a basic truth that the films that work are the films that are made with passion.'

Maybe passion is too strong a word, though the fact that producers, whose commitment to film-making is every bit as strong (if not stronger) than directors or screenwriters, should traditionally be regarded as the philistines of the film industry has always seemed to me to be both grossly unfair and a romantic hangover from literary criticism (not to mention the auteur theory). And there is very little other than passion that can account for the continued commitment, against daunting odds, to British film production of people like Michael White ('you can't give up something you love'), Leon Clore ('I would regard myself as a film-maker; I just like making films') and Clive Parsons ('I don't know why one sticks with it: I suppose it's because that's what we are: film producers'). ■

From left: Jerzy Skolimowski directs 'Moonlighting'; Jeremy Irons.

Albert Finney and Diane Keaton in 'Shoot the Moon'; Alan Parker directs 'Shoot the Moon'.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

THE 35th was the last Cannes festival to be held in the old Palais. Next year, the circus moves half a mile or so to the concrete fortress still under construction on the site of the winter casino, a setting for Coppola replacing one for Jacques Demy, where the mirrors once reflected Jeanne Moreau in *Baie des Anges*. The new Palais is going to be in the style of Britain's National Theatre, though looking much larger; in its incomplete state a formidable rather than an appealing spectacle. But its space, at least, is going to be needed. This year the crowds, which in 1981 had seemed to be in retreat, were back in force: streets choked with tourists, who if they were looking to spot film stars looked in vain, house-full notices if you arrived a minute late for a screening, and ferocious barging and pushing to get in to some big name films. The video screens around the Palais, endlessly running trailers for the wares on sale, are reminders that this whole concentration of cinema is becoming an anachronism when it can all be carried about on a reel of tape; but it's one that won't lie down in a hurry.

● This was, in some ways, a curious festival. Of twenty-two films listed in competition, four came from America (and three of those were directed by Europeans) and eleven from France, Italy, Britain and Germany. There was nothing from India or Japan, nothing from any of the Scandinavian countries, from the Soviet Union or Australia. Such a line-up can't reflect the way films really are in the world, though no one cares too much about that statistical balance if the pictures on view make their case by their quality. But in the first week there were several in the Palais likely to empty any cinema with the temerity to play them—most notably perhaps Paulo Rocha's *Island of Loves*, a Portuguese/Japanese film about the writer de Moraes, of a statuesque, incantatory and exquisitely boring kind guaranteed to give art cinema a bad name. A festival which has ignored Manoel de Oliveira seemed to be making amends to Portugal of a strangely misguided kind.

● Choices are often baffling. France frequently botches its Cannes selection, and this year, with new films by Rohmer, Chabrol and others in the wings and presumably available, chose instead to field, back to back on the same day, the untried team of Peter del Monte, whose *Invitation au Voyage* concerns a young man transporting his twin sister's corpse around France in a cello case, and Gérard Guérin, whose *Douce Enquête sur la Violence* looks obliquely, not unsympathetically but by no means tellingly enough at the surroundings and circumstances of a terrorist kidnapping. Most observers seemed to write off both films; I stayed with the Guérin, which has a good performance by Michael Lonsdale as the kidnapped industrialist and some taking scenes, such as a staged interview to camera with an old lady who took in a terrorist as a lodger, and kept looking like a film on the verge of pulling itself into shape. As entries in the year's main competitive festival, however, both films were like very modest maidens given an unwarranted run in the Derby.

● In the less select atmosphere of the Marché, Chabrol's *Les Fantômes du*

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RICHARD ROUD

At a press conference after the world premiere of Steven Spielberg's entertaining and surprisingly touching *E.T.—Extra Terrestrial*, the director was asked if he was happy that his film was shown on closing night, and therefore out of competition. Yes, he said. He doesn't believe in comparing films any more than he does oranges and apples. He would only enjoy one kind of competition: if someone rich enough and crazy enough would give five directors $5 million each all to shoot the same script. Then you would really have a proper basis for competition. Still, one cannot help comparing the two outstanding films of the festival, Antonioni's *Identification of a Woman* and Godard's *Passion*. I remember a long and earnest discussion I had in 1960 with Patrick Bauchau, a young Frenchman (later to become an actor, most notably in *La Collectioneuse*), as to the relative merits of Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (in competition that year) and Godard's *Breathless* (shown in the market). Bauchau maintained that the Godard was better because it was more modern. I said I still thought the Antonioni was the better film. Of course, Bauchau was both right and wrong: Godard was more 'modern', just as *Passion* is more modern than *Identification of a Woman*. But modernity is not necessarily a decisive criterion.

● Both the Godard and the Antonioni films this year deal with film-making. Niccolo, Antonioni's protagonist (and alter ego?), is a fortyish divorced filmmaker in search of his next subject. Obsessively, he cuts out photographs from magazines and newspapers, looking for the woman who will inspire him, the face around which a story can be formed. At the same time, in a kind of two-way metaphor, he is looking for a new girlfriend. This is Antonioni's first film of contemporary Italian life since *Red Desert* eighteen (gulp!) years ago, and although the atmosphere of terrorism and violence is omnipresent (Antonioni claims that Italy now has the world's highest crime rate), it is a backdrop, not a background. This is the most important difference between this film and his earlier Italian films where background was as important as foreground, and it was often hard to know which determined which.

Scripted by Antonioni, Gérard Brach and Tonino Guerra, *Identification of a Woman* falls into two parts. The first is dominated by Mavvi, an aristocratic young woman with whom Niccolo has an affair, but who leaves him because she realises that he does not love her, but only needs her—just as he needs to find the right female face to inspire his next film. The second deals with another woman, and she ends up leaving him too, when she recognises, having discovered that she is pregnant by her previous lover, that Niccolo does not love her enough to accept being the father of another man's child. Niccolo decides in the end that his next film will probably be a science-fiction movie. Temporary retreat or final abdication?

Although Antonioni claims that this is his least formalistic film, it is none the less packed with austerely elegant shots, and the set-piece—a sequence in a totally

Chapelier seemed far better value, with the director back on his old stamping-ground of murder treated as a pastime of the bourgeoisie. Based on a Simenon story, the tale concerns a solid provincial tradesman (actually a hatter, and a very mad one) who disposes of his bedridden wife—keeping a dummy, *Psycho*-style, in her place—and also a fair selection of the local ladies. Admirably played by Michel Serrault, the quirkish killer has for neighbour a down-trodden tailor (Charles Aznavour) and for cronies a group of businessmen who meet nightly at the local café. Rain seems to sheet down whenever anyone stirs out of doors; streets are narrow, dark and twisting, as the hatter saunters down them with his betraying madman's walk. Many meals are eaten, until their provider, the slatternly maid, joins the corpses. Not the best of Chabrol, but sly, witty and crafted with that feeling for local character which habitually marks his scenes from provincial life.

● Another director sustained by his deceptive, off-beat instinct for the unexpected is Jerzy Skolimowski, whose *Moonlighting* impressed me as much as anything in competition in the first week. The film was made with exemplary speed, aimed from a February shooting start to meet the Cannes deadline. It sometimes looks hasty, but that is beside the point—feature films ought at times to manage this almost journalistic response, in this case to the Polish crisis. Jeremy Irons plays the foreman, and only English speaker, in a team of four Polish building workers transported from Warsaw to Kensington to renovate their boss's London house. He is not, he tells an immigration official, a member of Solidarity; he is also not too good a foreman, though ingenious about shoplifting (Skolimowski, it appears, is an admirer of *Pickpocket*, and his shoplifting scenes have the same obsessive concern with the mechanics of theft) and about deception. His objective is to get the job done, to survive without money, and to keep from his fellow-workers any news of the coup back home. Harassed, harried and solitary, he schemes, contrives, loses his grip on his lumpish colleagues. The film is very precise about what is on the screen—both the building work and the effort to exist in an alien setting—and full of sad, oblique, disorienting suggestions about the crisis that is not on the screen. It's a highly economical work with its own built-in sense of emergency, and everyone concerned, including especially the producer, Mark Shivas, should feel satisfied to have done it.

● I left Cannes too soon to see how the festival reacted to *Britannia Hospital*, Lindsay Anderson's choleric lampoon for the 80s, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue and whose outrage seems so much more splenetic than liberating. For many, it was certainly the festival's most eagerly awaited experience. The third British film in competition, Alan Bridges' *The Return of the Soldier*, from Rebecca West's novel about class, conscience and amnesia during the Great War, was by comparison very docile. This is filming of the sort that has found its natural home in the more stately brand of television drama, literate, good-looking and leisurely, with accomplished players wearing their period clothes to the manner (or manor) born. The only real surprise this time around came from Ann-Margret, who discreetly lifted the ▶

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fog-bound car—almost equals the bravura tracking shot at the end of *The Passenger*. But no matter how exquisite the framings, this is a more direct film than any he has made since the 50s, and it shows that Antonioni, now 70, no longer feels the need to experiment or astonish. There is about it, too, an almost classic serenity. He doesn't have to prove anything any more, so, as with some of Richard Strauss' later music, the film may seem old-fashioned. Not so: it transcends fashion. Superbly and justifiably self-confident, Antonioni, recapitulating earlier themes, has achieved a powerful, seemingly effortless synthesis.

● *Passion* is about two East European film-makers making a film called *Passion*. It is, however, totally different from Truffaut's *Day for Night*, Godard's own *Contempt* or the Antonioni. The first two were about people making a film, but they might have been about people engaged in any collective activity. The Antonioni was built up from a script. Godard had a kind of script—at least, I have seen a ten-page 'treatment'—but the storyline is difficult to decipher because he has deliberately pulverised the story into what might be called plot modules. Only by the end is one able to fit the pieces together. But fit they do.

In another sense, *Passion* is about the nature of cinema itself. It might well have been called 'Sight and Sound' for music and painting play an important role. Godard's conceit is that the film-within-the-film has no story, because before you can film a story you have first to live it. And it is significant that all the characters have the same Christian names as the actors who play them. So Jerzy (Radziwilowicz—Wajda's Man of Iron) and Lazlo (Szabo) are co-directing a film which seems to consist entirely of reconstructions, tableaux vivants, of six famous paintings (including Rembrandt's *Night Watch* and Goya's *Executions of the 3rd of May*) which are accompanied by extracts from such works as the Mozart and Fauré Requiems and Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. Sometimes the music accompanying the paintings carries over into real life, as when we see a silent videotape of Hanna (Schygulla) which looks as if the voice of the soprano singing a Mozart aria is coming from Hanna's lips: slightly out of synch, it is a breathtaking effect.

Some found the film perverse, and I suppose that the notion of making Isabelle (Huppert) stutter to symbolise the inarticulateness of many working-class girls could be considered perverse, just as the fact that her boss, Michel (Piccoli), against whom she is trying to organise a strike, coughs constantly to symbolise the capitalist choking on his contradictions might be considered too obscure and too simple-minded. But *Passion* cannot really be judged in that way. From the very first moment, when a plane and its vapour-trail streak diagonally across the bluest sky I have ever seen, there is that visceral excitement that only Godard can give. For all that he is an intellectual director, his films always work first on the gut level.

To say that the film is beautiful is not saying much, and yet it has to be said as baldly as that. Not beautiful like a painting (the paintings we used to see in reproduction on the walls of the rooms his characters lived in, but which we see here re-created live, as it were), not beautiful like a photograph, but beautiful ▶

picture from under the noses of her British co-stars, Glenda Jackson and Julie Christie.

● Alan Parker, working what could have been Woody Allen territory, directs *Shoot the Moon* at the top of his voice: if he could only calm down a little, allowing his characters more air to breathe in, he might pull off something rather good. But *Shoot the Moon*, with a promising script by Bo Goldman and the even more promising casting of Diane Keaton and Albert Finney, watches a marriage smash like a motorway pile-up until Finney finally runs amok all over Diane Keaton's newly built tennis court. Subtlety is hardly on hand, either, in Costa-Gavras' *Missing*, which has also opened already in London and which makes rather heavy weather of the tale of the naive American (Jack Lemmon) painfully discovering that his country's embassy, when embroiled in a South American (Chilean) coup, does not necessarily give priority to protecting the lives of US citizens.

● Susan Seidelman, a near novice from the independent sector ('I have made three shorts and one feature') was left with the distinction of being the only American-born director of an American film in competition. In effect, this was probably a little hard on *Smithereens*, a rather perky look at an old subject, a girl on the loose in New York trying to barge her way into other people's lives and homes. In the Quinzaine, its natural home, the film could have seemed a small discovery; in the Palais it looked frail, though worth noting for its ducking of clichés (no drug scene) and its sense of humour about some spectacularly limp and aimless characters. It cost a mere $80,000, which is salutary in itself.

● The other American entry, Wim Wenders' *Hammett*, seems to have been with us for years—started, shelved, resumed, and finally arriving in the wake of its Zoetrope stable-mate, *One from the Heart*. It's another confection from the studio, sealed into the airless world of pastiche, and it was not generally well received. But the rattle of typewriter keys in a dimly lit room, tapping out the story of woman operative Susan Alabama ('No, she was really Betty Philadelphia') gets it off to an irresistible start, and the fictional yarn which recalls Hammett (Frederic Forrest) to service as a private eye and sends him stumbling into Chinatown after a missing girl shows an entirely proper subservience to the conventions. The film begins by quoting (or, rather curiously, misquoting) Chandler's comment that Hammett 'gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons.' Long ago, the Hammett/Chandler/Bogart world became even more stylised than the polite English detective stories Chandler was deriding. It is the total acceptance of this (one of the scriptwriters, incidentally, is the playful, ingenious thriller writer Ross Thomas) that makes *Hammett* beguiling, even though it runs out of steam before the end and Roy Kinnear can't cope at all with the Sydney Greenstreet role. But the film has the feel of an old paperback thriller, picked off a rather musty shelf and reread with pleasure; and that, I take it, must have been what was aimed at.

● Tom Milne writes elsewhere about *Fitzcarraldo*, Werner Herzog's equally long-awaited movie. There is something very exhilarating about this extraordinary venture, as crazed and generous in its way as its protagonist's fancy of bringing an opera house worthy of Caruso to the jungle. Perhaps Herzog could, and in Coppola's world would, have done it all with models on a table-top in a studio; but there it actually is, the old steamship moving down the river, the jungle throbbing or ominously silent, the ship on its way to being manhandled over a mountain. The sense of a film lived as well as made spills over; the extravagance has been earned the hard way. But *Fitzcarraldo* also looks very assured and composed, and as innocent as such earlier

as film. The beauty is not only in the image but in the succession of images, and in their relationship with the soundtrack: not just the classical music, but also the plain ordinary noises. The sound of cars whooshing past on the motorway is as important as the Mozart, and it is the interplay between the three kinds of sound (music, noise and dialogue) which makes the film such an extraordinarily sensual experience.

So *Passion* is more 'modern' than *Identification of a Woman*, but does that necessarily mean it's better? In these days, we are so lucky to have two directors of the stature of Antonioni and Godard that it would be churlish even to try to say which is better.

● While no other film in the last week came up to these two masterpieces, there were four remarkable films: Karoly Makk's *Another Way*, the Hungarian competition entry; Peter Gothar's *Time Stands Still*, the Hungarian entry in the Directors' Fortnight; Eduardo de Gregorio's *The Aspern Papers*, also in the Directors' Fortnight; and a film from Mali, Souleymane Cissé's *The Wind*, shown in the Certain Regard section. Although both Hungarian films deal with the aftermath of 1956, and although Gothar studied film-making with Makk, the two films are very different. Makk's is more classical, more straightforward. Based on a Hungarian novel (drawn apparently from a true story), *Another Way* deals with two issues which might seem unrelated. Eva, an overtly lesbian journalist, has an unhappy love affair with another woman journalist who is married to an army officer. But it is also about the harassment of Eva by her bosses because she insists on writing the truth about post-1956 Hungary. Makk's contention is that the very fact that Eva is a sexual nonconformist is closely related to her political nonconformity. Since she cannot accept the sexual party line, she can more easily see through the political party line, and having had the courage to accept her sexual marginality, she finds it easier—and essential—to be a political outsider. A very courageous film.

● *Time Stands Still* begins in 1956 with the father of two little boys leaving for America. We then skip over ten years to pick up the boys at school, trying to live down the fact that they are the children of an enemy of the people. Much more elliptical than the Makk film (and occasionally downright confusing, at least for foreigners), it is shot in an expressionistic manner—oddly angled shots, unrealistic lighting effects, much murk. Very Mittel Europa in style, it seems to have been influenced by both avant-garde theatre

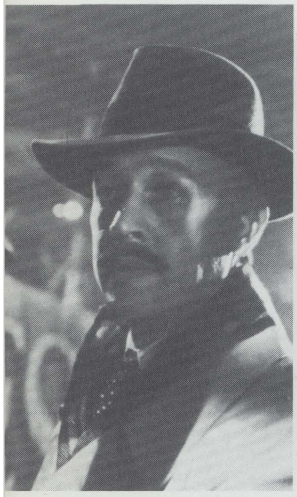
mad adventures on rivers as *The African Queen*. The fact that Fitzcarraldo is a Peruvian Indian corruption of Fitzgerald, and that he is played by the inescapably Germanic Klaus Kinski, becomes part of the operatic context; or the context of the handy Indian superstition quoted in the film, that 'real life' is the illusion and reality is in the dream.

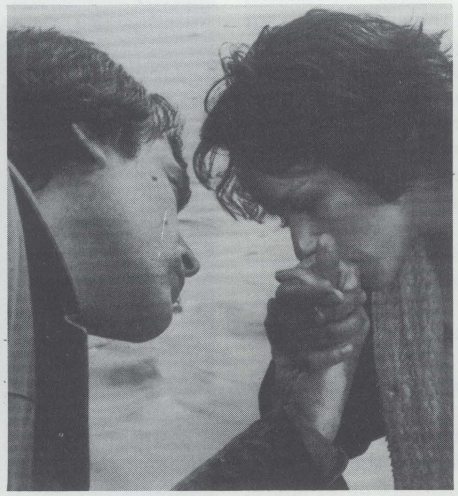
● The other remarkable film, carried out in even more extraordinary circumstances, was Yilmaz Güney's *Yol* (which apparently translates as *The Way*). As with his other works, Güney made the film by remote control, as it were, from his Turkish prison cell, with a loyal associate, Serif Goren, doing the actual direction on the ground. In an interview, Güney, now out of prison and out of Turkey, comments that 'The scenario that was submitted to the censor was shorter than the real scenario. Indeed, there are things in the film which were never in the scenario, and which I was able, as I had planned, to create out of the editing process.' So one would imagine: the Turkish authorities would have to be astonishingly lenient or astonishingly negligent to permit a film which puts their country high on the list of those not to be visited. *Yol* is concerned, simply, with a group of prisoners let out on ticket of leave from an island gaol, their journeys to a temporary freedom and the unpleasant experiences this brings them. It's a picture, particularly in the Kurdestan section, of a society locked into a bleakly repressive order, echoing in a way the kind of threats and warnings insistently repeated in early scenes over the prison loudspeaker system. But Güney makes it clear that he loves his country; more than audiences may do after seeing this implacable, impressive work.

● *Yol* could only have been made on the assumption that it *had* to be made. A problem with the new film by the Taviani brothers, who in the past have also conveyed that sense of driving political urgency, is in seeing a powerful enough motive for traversing the old ground of wartime liberation and loss. *The Night of San Lorenzo* begins coolly and compellingly—a window open on a starry sky, a quiet voice promising a story from the past. But the sense of the day of war as experienced by a child, and told a generation on to other children, moves only falteringly through the action. Some fine sequences—a night flight by the villagers across the countryside, a battle in a hayfield—show what the film-makers can do, though we knew it already.

● The other Italian film, Ettore Scola's *The Night of Varennes*, takes one of those deeply symbolic historical turning points and adds its own imaginary gloss. In a carriage, following the route of the fugitive French royal family towards their destiny at Varennes, rides a motley literary crew: Casanova (Mastroianni), Tom Paine (Harvey Keitel) and Restif de la Bretonne (Jean-Louis Barrault). As imaginary encounters go, this certainly has promise, particularly when Trintignant, Brialy and Hanna Schygulla are added to the cast. But Scola's all-star coachload dawdles along under a heavy load of aphoristic chatter, a film evidently made by intelligent people but not somehow an intelligent film. Eventually it dithers through what look like three separate closing sequences to end on the least well-judged—Restif de la Bretonne emerging into the streets of modern Paris, still indefatigably talking. Along the way, however, comes an enchanting notion: that Casanova invented the warning triangle for a breakdown on the road. □

From left:
Yilmaz Güney's 'Yol'.
Peter Gothar's 'Time Stands Still'.
Marilu Henner, Frederic Forrest in 'Hammett'.
Antonioni's 'Identification of a Woman'.
A tableau from Godard's 'Passion'.





and the German silent cinema. If the plotline is occasionally obscure, the message is not: this is the most frightening indictment of life under a certain kind of 'socialist' regime that I have ever seen—perhaps because it shows how even school life and adolescent love affairs are totally permeated and perverted by political dishonesty.

● *The Wind* is one of those rare African films one doesn't have to make excuses for. It's not a good African film, it's a good film. Just as *India Song* was once ingenuously reduced by someone to being 'that movie about an embassy party that fizzled', so *The Wind* could be described as being about the generation gap, with overtones of *Romeo and Juliet*. Its heroine is the daughter of a provincial military governor who falls in love with the descendant of one of the great traditional chiefs of an earlier age. Conflict is inevitable because both the boy and the girl can accept neither the corruption of the present government nor the 'wisdom' of the traditional values. Some have interpreted the *deus ex machina* happy end as being politically opportunistic, but I must confess that I don't know enough about Mali to tell. Cissé's earlier film *Baara* seemed promising to many; *The Wind* fulfils that promise.

● Produced and shot in Portugal, but spoken in French, *Les Papiers d'Aspern* is an updated version of the Henry James short novel. Scripted by Michael Graham, it stars Jean Sorel as the unscrupulous writer anxious to get his hands on an unpublished novel by the great writer Jeffrey Aspern which has been kept locked up by Aspern's last mistress (Alida Valli); Bulle Ogier is the old-maid niece he tries to persuade to help him. Skilfully shot and composed, the film also demonstrates that Bulle Ogier has more than one string to her bow. I have always been quite content to see her just being herself, but under de Gregorio's direction, she plays a character quite different from her usual Duras/Rivette persona. The most unforgettable sequence is that in which, timid and repressed though she is, she has to suggest to Sorel that although she must respect her dead aunt's wishes, the case would, perhaps, be somewhat different if Sorel were to become, as it were, a member, so to speak, of the family. Of course what she is saying is, marry me, and I'll give you the papers. But her speech, and the way she delivers it, is both a faithful rendition of James' later style at its most gorgeously circumvolutory and, at the same time, a realistic portrayal of a woman who is forcing herself to do something that she finds repugnant yet irresistible. ■

THE AGE OF TI

PHILIP STRICK

On 16 December 1940, John W. Campbell Jr, editor of the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, met the young writer Isaac Asimov to discuss a new 'positronic robot' story. During the discussion, the Three Laws of Robotics came into being, a fictional code designed to protect the safety of humans in a society which it was predicted would become increasingly dependent on robotic skills. The story, *Liar!*, was published in May 1941. It marked the 'birth' of Asimov's formidable robotics expert Susan Calvin, a heroine so chilling as to appear, on occasion, almost non-human herself, and established a formula for the subsequent series of Asimov robot dramas which have since been so widely reprinted that the Three Laws are now often assumed to be already in force.

They aren't. Forty years on, in July 1981, a worker stepped across a safety barrier at the Kawasaki Heavy Industries plant in Tokyo, and was promptly stabbed in the back by a mechanical protection device which impaled him against another machine. Among innumerable examples of death through industrial misadventure, this was a milestone, the world's first murder by robot. Asked to comment, Asimov observed: 'Robots so far are extremely unintelligent; as the spiritual father of robots, I say that the smarter they get, the less likely they are to make mistakes like this.' According to Asimov, any such creed as the Three Laws could only be obeyed by equipment above a certain level of comprehension ability. Above that same level it could also, one assumes, be disobeyed.

Nothing so far is said to have reached this grade, although it's daunting to learn that Japan produces about 20,000 robots a year and some 70,000 are already employed, with full labour union approval, in Japanese factories. These are intended to release their human counterparts for such creative work as the maintenance of existing machinery and the development of new, improved models, roles which illustrate the steady growth of a wholly robot-oriented culture.

Forty years further on, and it doesn't seem too much of a jump, the robots of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* are employed in off-world mining and exploration too hazardous for the human colonists who, fleeing from a polluted home planet, are establishing themselves across the solar system. No longer the clockwork cake-tins of pulp magazine tradition, these immaculate replicas of mankind are the finest products of genetic engineering, compiled as much from flesh and blood as from plastic and electronics, artificially structured in the laboratory to enjoy a subservient, arduous but limited lifespan. After four or five years, if they survive that long, their delicate components begin to disintegrate, and like any other man-made device they ultimately malfunction and are discarded in favour of later, more sophisticated versions. Contrary to Asimov's well-ordered universe, the chaotic opportunism of the 21st century has provided for no moralistic implant in android programming; these are creatures without conscience, guilt or fear. And as they begin to wear out, they sometimes go berserk and have to be destroyed. In *Blade Runner*, a few unstable constructs have found their way back to Earth (where their presence is forbidden) and are willing to murder in pursuit of an unknown objective. Somebody has to track them down and wipe them out.

The struggle with human facsimiles, as much a part of science fiction writing as Frankenstein, has in the cinema intensified only during the last dozen years. The trend-setter for this, as for so much else, was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, primarily by unleashing a flock of special effects graduates to teach the industry, in contrast to Kubrick's example, that it didn't cost a fortune to reconstruct outer space. In *2001*, the unsleepingly red-eyed computer HAL-9000, terminating life-systems in placid revenge for their complexity, spoke eloquently in warm and appealingly fallible tones for robot liberation. Like the prophet to a crusade, the gargling computer of *Alphaville* had earlier also struggled to improve the world by simplification, but HAL's self-determinism in the face of his dull and inexpressive astronaut passengers was more persuasive and, of course, more widely seen. The message took time, but it got through.

The revolt gathered momentum in the early 70s: the implacable super-computer Colossus in *The Forbin Project*, the petulant nuclear bomb in *Dark Star*, the berserk robot gunslinger in *Westworld*, the living dolls of *Stepford Wives*, all gave the machine a voice to touch the conscience. After *Star Wars*, its villains like storm-trooping puppets, its heroes a querulous android and a diminutive

Harrison Ford in 'Blade Runner'.

washing machine, its true stars a vast model-making and special effects team, there was no looking back—a robot was as good as a human any day. To prove it, an unlikely heap of wires, tubes, chromium and noise (in competition with Kirk Douglas) lusted after Farah Fawcett-Majors in *Saturn 3*, and a household computer had its way with Julie Christie in Donald Cammell's *Demon Seed*.

Animated hardware was a vital component of *Alien*, *The Black Hole*, and such wearying spin-offs as *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers in the 21st Century*. In the unjustly maligned *Star Trek: the Motion Picture*, which hypnotically intertwines a film by Robert Wise with another by Douglas Trumbull, the machine disguises itself as Persis Khambatta and pesters the Starship Enterprise

HE REPLICANT

for news of God with, in a sense, surprising success. And in *Heartbeeps*, the Allan Arkush follow-up to *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, robots Andy Kaufman and Bernadette Peters fall in love, construct a baby from a wrecked truck ('Look darling, it has your wiring') and search for happiness with a mechanical cop hard on their heels.

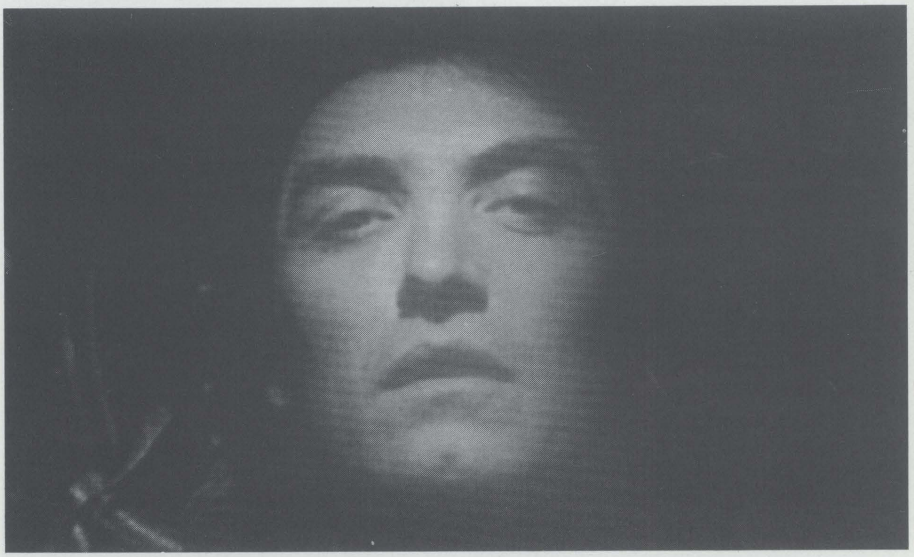
In the light of *Blade Runner*, these appear no more than preliminary skirmishes to a war that now begins in earnest. Scott's film finds the human and the un-human almost indistinguishable, outwardly as similar as, say, cop and robber, spectator and performer. As a result, the destruction of one by the other is the more disturbing and internecine. In all but longevity, there is no question of the superiority of the replicants—they are admirably fast, strong, skilful and resourceful, triumphs of human ingenuity. The plodding bounty hunter assigned to eradicate them (played by Harrison Ford) is uninspired, uncouth, grumbling but persistent, the standard seedy private eye haunted by doubts, drink and defeatism. He's obviously in the Marlowe mould, but his origin is not in fact detective fiction. Both he and his prey, together with their predicament, are from the universe of Philip K. Dick.

The recent discovery of Philip K. Dick by a wider audience than the science fiction fans who have been grappling with him in mingled delight and exasperation since 1952, when his first short story appeared, will have come too late to offer reassurance to a writer for whom the world at large has always been elusive. He died suddenly in March this year in his early fifties, and with his death has come the realisation that his was a singularly resonant voice in speculative fiction and modern writing generally. In Europe, where nearly forty of his novels and collections have remained reasonably available, he has attracted greater respect than in the United States, where the superb novel that he himself regarded as his finest, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), sold for a mere $2,500 advance. But even in Britain, the popular status of an Arthur C. Clarke, an Anthony Burgess or a John Fowles has evaded him (not, as far as one can judge, that he was ever in hot pursuit), and it will take the cinema—and, as for these three, a cinema of intricate fantasy—to render him public knowledge.

Dick does not make easy reading. He lacks the informality of Clarke, the vocabulary of Burgess, the pointillism of Fowles. His phrasing is often clumsy, bathetic, despairing, a tangle of moods and impressions hurled like warnings of imminent catastrophe. His characters tumble angrily past as if their appearance in the narrative were an unwelcome distraction. The first paragraphs of a Dick novel habitually plunge us into an environment so intact with images, purposes and objectives as to incline us to reconsider the accuracy of our own perceptions. The typical Dick hero is similarly in a state of confusion, seeing himself as an insignificant component in an elaborate social mechanism requiring effort, conformity and commitment for no very clear reward. The rules of the game may change at any moment, nothing is permanent, and a malignant, vaguely godlike presence monitors his every move in the expectation of failure. Dick's is the science fiction of the average citizen attempting an unremarkable survival in an environment that considers him uninteresting and expendable. Far from the bright, muscular heroic myths of *Star Wars* or *Superman*, it lurks in the dark labyrinths of paranoia.

What renders his work so absorbing is its inventiveness and its humour, dizzyingly based on a lunatic logic. Both are combined in the premise of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the 1968 novel on which *Blade Runner* is based. The near eradication of Earth's animal life other than man has resulted in the measurement of wealth by ownership of livestock, and in accordance with a catalogue that gives current values as if for antiques or second-hand cars, people acquire goats, sheep and cows as status symbols. If they can't afford genuine animals, they settle for working models. One of the most valuable creatures listed

Top: Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner'. Bottom: Paul Bamborough's 'The Tom Machine'.



is the toad, said to have been extinct for years; when, near the end of the book, one is discovered in the desert, hopes of a fabulous reward are high until it proves to have a tiny control panel in its abdomen. Against this bizarre background of pervasive fakery, the erosion of authentic humanity by undetectable android imitations has all the plausibility of a new and lethal plague whereby evolution would become substitution and nobody would notice the difference. The notion is rich with political and metaphysical implications, but Dick pins it firmly on the obvious target of technology through which, should man wish to lift a finger, future prosthetics will do it for him. And in his view, defeat is already in sight.

It looks as if *Blade Runner* is only one of the indications that the warning signs are being noticed. Two other films from Philip K. Dick stories are in preparation, both based on screenplays by Dan O'Bannon (of *Dark Star* and *Alien*), and both illustrating a similar concern with the mutation of man by machine. A short story from 1953, *Second Variety*, is announced for filming as *Claw* by Capital Pictures; the setting is a battleground on which the few remaining infantrymen are fighting waves of adversaries which are no longer human, but self-generating weapons. These devices have built themselves into simulated victims of war and as wounded soldiers, lost girls and infants clutching teddy bears are infiltrating the few remaining trenches to destroy all living troops.

At Walt Disney, a production called *Total Recall* is derived from *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*, a story first published in the magazine *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in April 1966, in which Dick's customary no-account toiler attempts to better himself by purchasing a memory treatment process that will convince him he's secretly a special agent who has been to Mars. Unfortunately, the phoney recollection clashes with a genuine memory, buried in his subconscious, and he begins to realise that maybe he *has* been to Mars and was better off for not knowing it. Again the collision between fact and fiction conveys a sense of rising panic, and although the Disney studios can be expected to modify this it's intriguing that two other major Disney projects, Ray Bradbury's Gothic fantasy *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and a 'hard science' thriller *Tron*, in which a video-game champion becomes absorbed by his own computer, sound to be along uneasily similar lines.

Although Dick wrote enough to inspire a generation of film-makers, *Blade Runner* is nevertheless the first of his novels to make it to the big screen. Jean-Pierre Gorin, Godard's collaborator (*Tout Va Bien*) from the 1970s, attempted without success to get Hollywood backing for *Ubik*, Dick's haunting 1969 chiller about time-reversal in which, as things wear out, they dissolve into earlier models of themselves. John Lennon wanted to make *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1966), which was briefly optioned by *Mean Streets* producer Jonathan Taplin. But so far there has been only one small prologue to *Blade Runner*'s thunder, in the form of *The Tom Machine*, a National Film School graduation work that won the Grierson Award in 1980 and has appeared at a dozen international festivals (it was a prizewinner at Tours and Trieste) but which, in the nature of film school efforts, is unlikely to achieve full-scale distribution.

Although not derived from a specific story, *The Tom Machine* was created by Dick enthusiast Paul Bamborough with such accuracy that when he subsequently read *Time Out of Joint* (1965) he found almost the exact plot of the completed film. It stars Donald Sumpter as Tom, the archetypal average, whose regimented existence revolves around seemingly pointless daily duties at a computer console, in which imminent emergencies among the cascade of charts and figures are averted only by the skill with which he gloomily runs his fingers over the keyboard. Every night, in his soulless apartment, he is entertained, fed, and ordered asleep and awake by a domestic computer which, speaking with the voice of John Cleese, is fully as petulant as See Threepio.

Unable to get any sense from his colleagues and superiors about the true worth of his job, Tom at last decides to walk out, make for the country, and rear sheep ('Sheep are the only species I've ever had a fondness for,' Dick said in a 1974 interview, 'I think maybe because they're so helpless'). It's then revealed to us, but not to Tom, that he is in fact an integral part of a vital space mission, a computer of such sensitivity that a production team of actors and technicians is employed to create his 'life' back on earth and broadcast it to him continuously to maintain the illusion that he's human. Chief co-ordinating element of the space probe, he *can't* become

Left: Tony Scott's 'The Hunger'; Catherine Deneuve, David Bowie.

physically detached from it. But he tries to, just the same . . .

Neatly written and designed, although the performances suggest a touch of haste, *The Tom Machine* handsomely embodies the Dick malaise. One would hope for more and better, but since graduation, apart from making a single educational film for the BBC, Bamborough has not yet broken out into a production career. Instead, he has himself become ensnared in the Tom machine trap and is currently, ironically enough, in computer design, shaping the look of the future and loathing every minute of it. 'Computers are primitive, rotten machines, not dramatic in any way. There's a kind of subculture of computer magazine fiction, full of dreadful science fiction stories centred on computer peculiarities, but the truth is that computers are deadly boring.' He is said to be giving some thought to the possibilities of sheep-farming.

The electric sheep were an early casualty in the translation of *Do Androids Dream* into *Blade Runner*, although the concept of synthetic animals is still fundamental to the film's forty-years-on society. First considered in 1969 by Martin Scorsese, the book was then optioned by Herb Jaffe Associates and a comedy screenplay written by Robert Jaffe which according to Dick was so bad that when they first met 'I wanted to know if he wanted me to beat him up there at the airport or wait till we got to my apartment.'

Meanwhile the actor and scriptwriter Hampton Fancher had set his heart on filming the only science fiction (apart from Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*) he'd ever read, and persuaded another actor, Brian Kelly, to pick up the lapsed option when Jaffe abandoned it. Then it was Fancher's turn to attempt a screenplay, having earlier failed to persuade Dick to write it himself. First results, as has been well documented in Dick interviews (notably with James Van Hise in *Starlog*, February 1982), did not please the author, although he conceded that if Hollywood wanted to rehash *Sheep* into a gut-spilling Mickey Spillane melodrama there was nothing he could do to stop them. 'When I read it originally I thought that I will move to the Soviet Union where I am completely unknown and work making light bulbs in a factory and never even look at a book again and pretend that I can't read.'

The turning point came, it seems, with the introduction of David Webb Peoples, who reread the novel, coined the term 'replicant' (from a process in molecular biology) in order to get away from the too familiar 'android' label, and tinkered the screenplay into something which greatly pleased Dick. Peoples is in fact no newcomer to praise. He co-wrote and co-edited *The Day After Trinity*, the documentary about the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer and his role in producing the first atomic bomb, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1981. He wrote an Oscar-nominated short, *Arthur and Lilly*, and edited John Korty's Oscar-winning documentary *Who Are the Debolts?*, the story of an American couple with an adopted family of nineteen handicapped and orphan children. Threads running through all these can be seen in the textures of *Blade Runner*: the doomed parent, the disadvantaged offspring, the limited lifespan, the precarious future, the prices to be paid for scientific development. Although aspects of the original book had disappeared completely, the Peoples version of the Fancher project became an honourably lifelike personification of Dick's own themes.

Ridley Scott, who only met Dick briefly when *Blade Runner* was nearly complete and had not at that time read any of his work, plucked the title from a reference in the script. It is a 'licensed to kill' term for the trained replicant-hunter, and coincidentally the title of a 1974 science fiction thriller by Alan E. Nourse for which William Burroughs once wrote *Blade Runner (A Movie)* as a screen treatment. Clearances were necessary, although nothing else of Nourse or Burroughs was used. Like *Gumshoe*, the title is a convenience, judged to lend more punch to the advertising than Dick's quirky, endearing *Do Androids Dream* . . . As with *Alien*, Scott's first objectives when brought into the project were to give it speed, selling power, and a 'Heavy Metal' look that would be the equivalent of Ron Cobb's *Nostromo* and H. R. Giger's intestinal mechanoids for the previous film. Convinced that the colonisation of American cities by immigrant communities will intensify, he decided that the street-level settings of *Blade Runner* would be dominated by Oriental groups, Chinese food-counters and sushi-bars, Cambodian craftsmiths, Hong Kong jewellers, Japanese nightclubs. With this concept, he unknowingly provided a background that any Philip K. Dick fan would immediately recognise from *The Man in the High Castle* (1963),

Dick's great alternate-universe novel in which America, having lost the Second World War, is divided into German and Japanese-controlled zones.

Nicknamed 'Ridley's Inferno' during shooting, Scott's city, which he will tell you privately is Pittsburgh, is the best thing that's happened in megalopolis movies since Fritz Lang; it certainly puts to shame the plastic modelling of *Logan's Run* or the furtive muddle of *Soylent Green*. A splendid patchwork of special effects by Douglas Trumbull and his associate cinematographer Richard Yuricich (they worked together on *2001*, *Silent Running*, *Close Encounters*, *Star Trek* and the currently problematical *Brainstorm*) portrays an awesome conglomerate of towering, hyper-industrialised skyscrapers thrusting from the polluted slums of the lower levels. A grim brown carpet of cloud unleashes a ceaseless torrent of rain. Massive advertising videoscreens cover the sides of buildings or are carried over the crowds by flying vehicles, their slogans an insistent muttered chorus on the film's stereophonic soundtrack. Scott's new Giger turned out to be Syd Mead, industrial design consultant for such as US Steel, the Ford Motor Company, Chrysler and the Singer Company; he worked on the V'ger sequences for *Star Trek* and has contributed to Disney's *Tron*. Mead's book of futurist paintings, *Sentinel*, gave Scott the portraits he needed for cars that could hover and take off vertically, called Spinners in the film, and as a bonus the entertaining prospect of parking meters designed to kill the meddlesome motorist.

Dominating the city is the mile-high Tyrell Corporation Pyramid, home of the genetics industry's mastermind (played by Joseph Turkel, formerly barman at Kubrick's Overlook Hotel). The Tyrell offices are vastly pillared in Third Reich splendour, and Tyrell's serene assistant Rachael (Sean Young) has the angular black dress and severely swept hairstyle of a Nazi secretary. The blade runner's chief replicant quarry (Rutger Hauer from *Nighthawks*) is blond Nordic superbreed. When he saw them, these visualisations drew from Dick the reminder that it was his research into Gestapo records for *Man in the High Castle* that had given him the basis for *Do Androids Dream*. 'I thought, there is amongst us something that is a bi-pedal humanoid, morphologically identical to the human being but which is not human. It is not human to complain, as one SS man did in his diary, that starving children are keeping you awake. And there, in the 40s, was born my idea that within our species is a bifurcation, a dichotomy between the truly human and that which mimics the truly human.'

With its final scene, *Blade Runner* exorcises the Nazi ghost; replicant and bounty hunter, after an attenuated struggle, recognise a fragile alliance in the brevity of their existence. Dick saw this as the expression of another of his novel's concerns—'the tragic theme that if you fight evil, you will wind up becoming evil, and this is the condition of life'—but an added complexity is infused by Ridley Scott's view of the story. Scott conceived the Tyrell Pyramid originally as the tomb of the mogul geneticist, the 'father' of the replicants. It was to be revealed that the 'live' Tyrell was in fact android, and that the human remains were in pharaonic preservation at the heart of the building, awaiting a time when the same research that was producing ever-improved replicants would at last come up with the secret of an indefinitely extended lifespan.

The ageing process has no point of reference in Dick's novel, although the style of the *Blade Runner* city, with its gargantuan new architecture grafted on to the old with deliberate awkwardness so that the past keeps showing through, is consistent with the ideas of *Ubik*. But the replicants' struggle against terminal breakdown is the mainspring of Scott's construction, leading them to confront Tyrell with a cry for more life. Their guide is the key member of Tyrell's team, a new Coppélius, whose apartment (in the timeless Bradbury Building) is full of lifesize dolls, puppets and clockwork toys. Designer of the robots, he is afflicted with the Methuselah Syndrome; he is ageing prematurely, and at twenty his face is already ancient with creases. The replicants are *his* children too, and if they carry his hope against nightfall they also bear the inevitable weakness of his early mortality.

As Scott was preparing *Blade Runner*, a script came to his agent for a film called *The Hunger*. Ridley's agent is also Tony's, and as the one Scott was busy the project was suggested for his brother, who had been working on a screenplay called *My Dog's on Fire* by David Peoples ('very strange, set in the year 3000, basically about gangs of kids called Mousepacks patrolling the streets of New York'). Tony Scott, who in partnership with Ridley has been making commercials ever since he emerged from the Royal College of Art, created two films for the BFI Production Board but has otherwise found his career thwarted by the collapse of two major productions, cancelled at the last minute—one for Paramount, the other for Filmways. He met Dick Shepherd, head of production at MGM in the era of *The Goodbye Girl*, *Fame* and *Clash of the Titans*, by the time-honoured process of sitting next to him in a plane, and when Shepherd saw a reel of his commercials ('What really got to me was the Hovis and the Lee Cooper jeans') there was no problem with *The Hunger*, which turned out to be a Shepherd project.

As it happens, *The Hunger* is a film about accelerated ageing and the hunt for eternal life. Based on a novel by Whitley Streiber (who wrote *Wolfen*), it stars Catherine Deneuve as an immortal being masquerading as human, who drifts through the centuries in parasitical symbiosis with a succession of lovers. Her current partner, played by David Bowie, discovers that he has reached the limit of the extended youthfulness his mistress has been able to confer upon him, and begins to decline rapidly into senility. They find in New York a specialist in gerontology (Susan Sarandon), who is researching the possible reversal of the ageing process, and she is drawn into the ménage with interestingly horrific results.

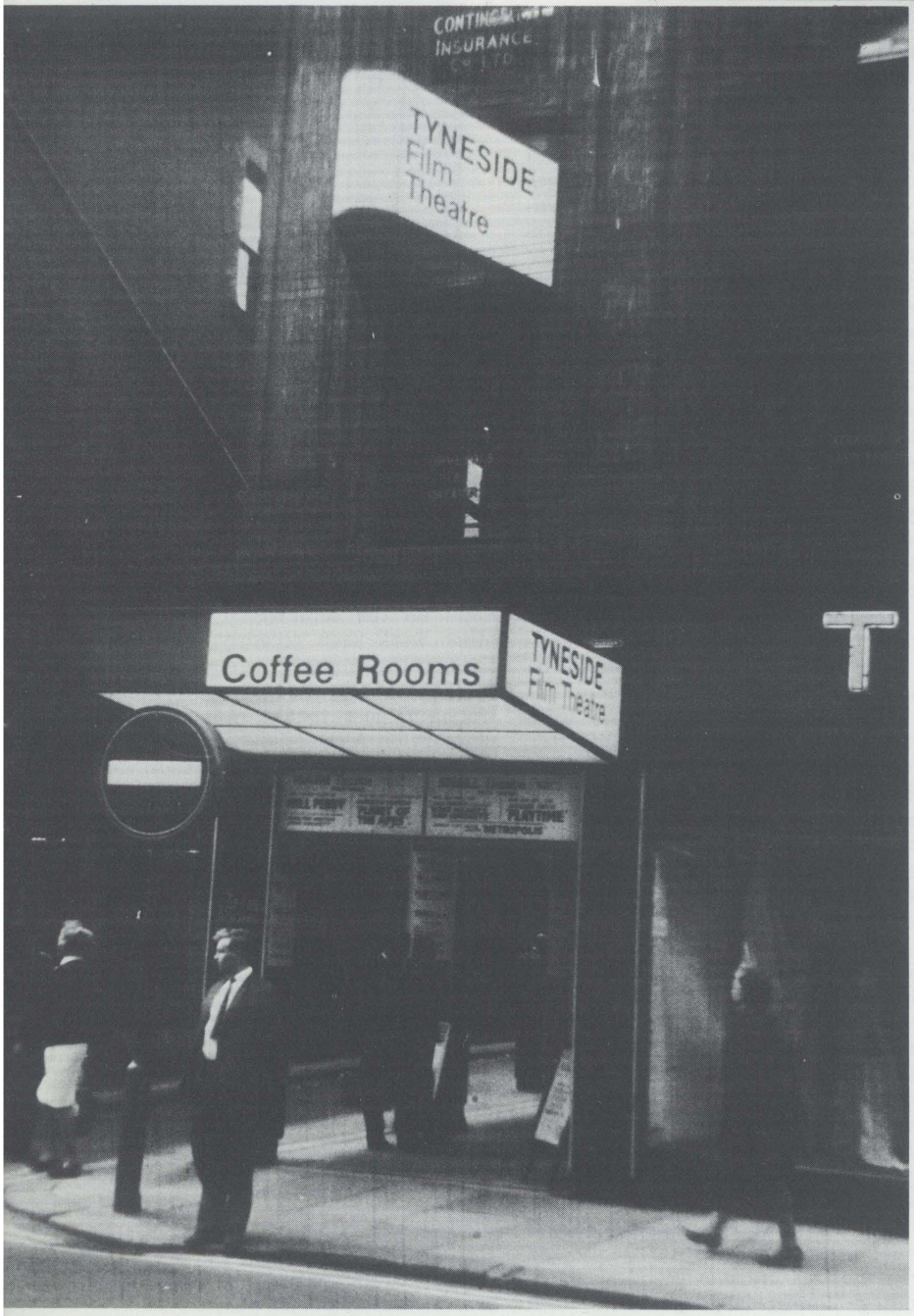
Scott admits cheerfully that the death-in-life theme has always fascinated him. Both his BFI films, *One of the Missing* and *Loving Memory*, poised their central characters on the edge of death, and for *The Hunger* the shells of unburied corpses preserved in an eerie semi-death at the Mexican town of Guanajuato (and in attendance at the credits of Herzog's *Nosferatu*) were a particular inspiration. Echoing *Blade Runner*, *The Hunger* includes references to progeria, an appalling disease whose ten-year-old victims have the physical characteristics of people in their seventies, and to the centres which already exist for life-prolongation. 'We place the Susan Sarandon character in a "sleep clinic" modelled on those places in California where they believe that through sleep pattern and diet you can stretch your life by fifteen to twenty years. There's one in Austria, where they actually recycle your blood.'

There could be other cross-references between the two Scott films by the time *The Hunger* is finished. Both productions have their allusions to ancient Egypt, both indulge in symbolism by means of a white dove (and with equal risk), and both have been shot through the gentle haze of smoke that seems to be a Scott trademark and which guarantees stunning quality of camerawork. Both films are themselves replicants of a kind, shot-for-shot simulacra of the detailed storyboards which the Scotts, each a brilliant designer, prepare in advance, drawing out their films on paper like miniature *Heavy Metal* comic strips. Above all, both films rely on a wholly modern artifice, the often invisible application of special effects to impersonate reality. For *The Hunger*, the puppet-master is Dick Smith, who in thirty-five years has altered states for everyone from Dan Curtis to Ken Russell and for everything from *The Cardinal* to *The Exorcist*. Linda Blair's revolving head, Marlon Brando's jowls in *The Godfather*, De Niro's bloodbath at the end of *Taxi Driver*, Katharine Ross' 'double' in *Stepford Wives*, Smith has faked them all. Turning David Bowie into a 200-year-old for *The Hunger* has been no more daunting than making veins burst from the faces of the contestants in *Scanners*.

'The quantum leap,' says Smith, 'has been in the last dozen years. Now everybody wants make-up illusions, and the technical and chemical developments have come up with the materials for us to do the job. We discovered, for example, that the cleaning fluid trichloroethane causes foam latex to swell, and so we could raise words on Linda Blair's skin in the *Exorcist* or make an actor's face burst open from snake venom in *Death Bite*. It's no problem for us to make any kinds of limbs and do anything to them. We can make entire people if need be. Make them wholesale.' ■

...WHO ONLY THE WEST END KNOW

Below: Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Right: Norwich.



TIM PULLEINE samples English regional tastes

It was in 1950, in the course of a contribution to *Picturegoer*, that Michael Powell adapted Kipling to demand, 'What do they know of England, who only the West End know?' But at that time, though Powell might charge that the British cinema was hampered by the supposed Shaftesbury Avenue parochialism of reviewers, and others might complain that its own sensibility hardly reached beyond the closed circle of London W1, there was little ground for concern that those further afield would have any problem in judging for themselves what was on offer, from Britain or elsewhere: the very existence of such a mass-circulation magazine as *Picturegoer* seemed to testify to that.

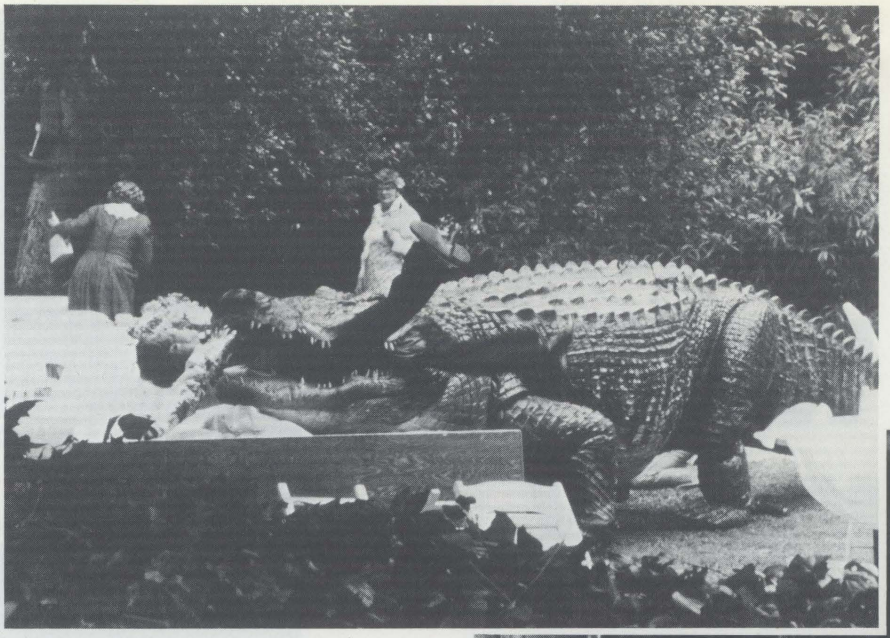
Throughout Britain's postwar austerity years, the cinemagoing habit, which had reached its zenith with over 1,600 million admissions in 1946, declined only slightly. In 1951, when the number of TV licences totalled only three-quarters of a million, cinema admissions were nearly 1,400 million, and they were clocked up at 4,624 picture houses, a figure less than 100 down on five years before.

It is probably impossible for someone born much after the end of World War Two fully to comprehend the one-time ubiquity of 'the pictures' as a social institution, with a choice of several cinemas in virtually every small town. But

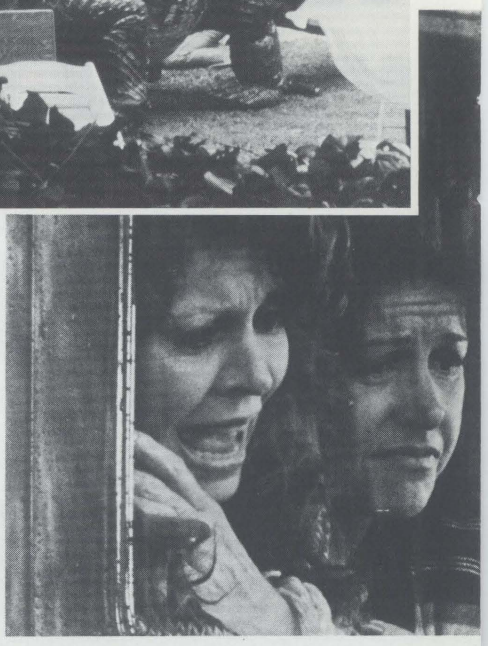
anybody consulting the files of a local newspaper is liable to be amazed, from today's perspective, at the range of celluloid that even quite out of the way places had to offer. Moreover, a casually byzantine apparatus of revivals and repeat showings offered a kind of continuing repertory. At least so far as the sound film—then only some two decades old—was concerned, anyone with an instinct for the cinema was able, as if by osmosis, to absorb a good many of its traditions within a comparatively short time. Sunday night 'oldies' and the like were there for the asking for those ready to plunge, in a spirit of adventure which perhaps reflected a teasing acknowledgment of the cinema's taint of unrespectability, into the outer suburbs: an issue of *Sequence,* for instance, carries a communiqué from expeditions to snare *The Old Dark House* and *Submarine Patrol,* and David Thomson's admirable essay 'I Remember When It Was a Cinema' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1977) recalls similar journeyings, a decade or so later, after the early work of Nicholas Ray and Anthony Mann.

This is, admittedly, to speak only of English-language cinema. But at the same time a fairly wide range of foreign films was easily to be seen. Indeed, during the 50s, whether as a reflection of more adventurous tastes or simply of a shortage of more conventional product, several foreign, or at any rate French, films actually went subtitled round the circuits, not just Bardot and Clouzot, but *Rififi* and even *French Cancan* too. But leaving this, and at the other extreme the film societies, out of account, there were specialist cinemas in the major cities, like the Birmingham Cinephone and Leeds Tatler, interspersing Academy-style movies with others that might have first opened in the Tottenham Court Road, often thrillers in which stars like Françoise Arnoul were apt to be snatched from the clutches of white slave gangs. (One might parenthetically observe that this genre of production is one now all but unseen in Britain: virtually none of the films discussed in David Nicholls' article on French crime movies in the Spring issue of SIGHT AND SOUND has been distributed in this country.) Beyond these cinemas, however, the degree to which foreign movies percolated around the country, if sometimes in dubbed versions, can be perceived from randomly consulting the 'Filmguide' feature which *Films & Filming* carried in its early years. In one month in 1957, *Il Bidone* could be seen in Dundee and Wolverhampton, *Touchez pas au Grisbi* in South Shields and Chingford, *L'Auberge Rouge* in Maidenhead and Smethwick.

But as this ostensible pluralism flourished, outside forces—social and economic—were busily placing the writing on the wall for the cinema as a mass commodity. *Movie* might in 1962 preface its review of *Underworld USA* with an exhortation that readers seek it out at the most 'sordid and inaccessible' cinemas, but within a few years inaccessibility would mainly have been converted into non-existence. In *The Contemporary Cinema,* published in 1963, Penelope Houston wrote of the disappearance of the 'backstreet cinema with its atmosphere of draughts and disinfectant and twice-weekly changes of extraordinary double-feature programmes,' adding, 'It goes with its audience, which ... asked little more than that it remember to change its programme twice a week.' Conceivably, a more affluent version of that same audience is nowadays to be identified in the crowds of customers at the video rental agencies.



'Alligator': all the ingredients for box-office success? ...



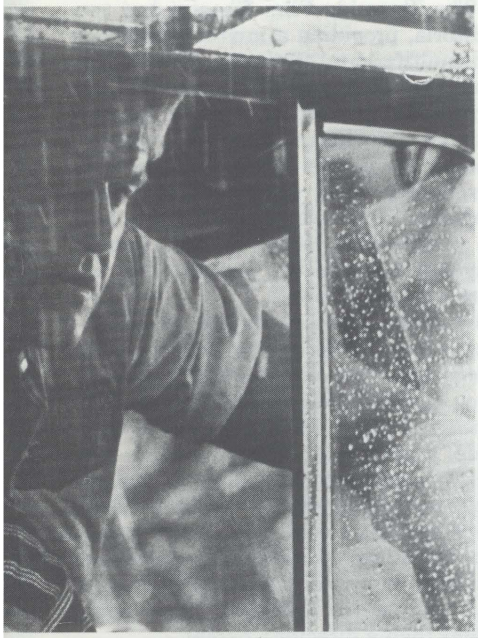
'Citizens Band': in Norwich an audience of one ...

Statistics, as news editors tend to know, exert their own potency even if they do not necessarily tell the whole story, and published figures reveal that cinema admissions fell from 1,101 million in 1956 to 289 million a decade later, by which time the number of movie theatres was down to 1,871. Admissions have, of course, continued to plummet: 107 million in 1976, 86 million last year. The actual number of screening venues has not fallen all that much—there were 1,562 in 1980—but seating capacity has, cut virtually by half between 1971 (1.38 million) and 1979 (721,000). Since the twinning and tripling rationalisation which took root in the late 60s, cinemas have become progressively smaller, closer, it might even be claimed, to the TV experience. It is perhaps indicative, too, of the manner in which the old family audience had been deemed to vanish that in 1968 X certificates accounted for 169 of the 401 films released (the corresponding figures for 1951, the year the X was introduced, were 31 films out of 631).

During the 60s, moreover, the film industry increasingly found itself in retreat from its protectionist attitude towards making its product available to TV. With the start of the BBC's second channel in 1964, not only were more, and ever newer, feature movies transmitted, including foreign-language ones, but there was the beginning of a trend to show films in arranged seasons (albeit sometimes of a fairly grab-bag character). Earlier this year, Chabrol's *The Twist* received its British première at dead of night on the commercial channel, and other work seen recently for the first time on the domestic screen ranges from several items in the BBC's series of Australian movies to the mammoth documentary on Alger Hiss (which, it is true, had earlier had an LFF showing). As for revivals, a casually selected *Radio Times* listing of one week's films on BBC encompassed work by Welles, Duvivier, Tashlin and Minnelli, not to mention a Tom Mix Western of 1926. And this is to speak before the advent of Channel Four.

The general cinema audience now is heavily weighted towards youth: a 1978 survey indicated that fifty-four per cent of filmgoers were aged between 15 and 24, with a peak at 19. More recent research for the Cinema Advertising Association suggests that a few movies—*Manhattan* was the most evident contemporary example—drew appreciably on the over-25s, though it is mildly bizarre to be told that the only type of productions which attract more than a fractional number of over-45s (admittedly, predominantly men) are such films as *The Stud* and *The Bitch.*

'You can never forget you're in a declining market; you're always having to pull rabbits out of hats.' The words are those of Liz Wrenn, film programmer for the Barbican Arts Centre, the Hampstead Everyman, and at its inception last year (though no longer) of the Duke of York, a reopened specialist cinema in Brighton, and one of a growing number of repertory cinemas to be found around London and in various parts of the country. She lays stress on both a unified publicity image ('I swear by leaflets') and a diversified programme, maintaining that a repertory system not only reduces overheads (without getting too technical about it, this broadly means that the guarantee paid to the distributor comes at a somewhat lower rate) but also provides a means of appealing to different sections of a potential audience.



'Kagemusha': an established subtitled winner.

The diversification she sought at Brighton was precisely structured, not just so far as principal screenings were concerned (recent art house pictures around the weekends, revivals of Hollywood classics—Dietrich, *film noir*—midweek) but even more so in terms of late-night shows: older foreign films on Thursdays, mainstream English-speaking classics (*The Third Man,* say) on Fridays, rock and horror pictures on Saturdays. It might, incidentally, seem revealing that a sample schedule from Visionhire Showcable, a localised cable TV service for parts of south London, is constructed along analogous lines: thus, Hollywood *auteurs* (*Fort Apache, Build My Gallows High*) at off-peak times, horror films late-night, recent up-market successes (*The Turning Point, Picnic at Hanging Rock*) in mid-evening.

While Liz Wrenn feels that some small cinema managements lack a realistic knowledge of their audience's requirements—she refers incredulously to one rival offering Elvis Presley vehicles as late-night youth fare—she also believes that the video boom is tending to make the popular audience more ready to take a chance on old or off-beat films; though this is not, she concedes sadly, a readiness she can ever see stretching to encompass foreign art movies. With the Everyman, which has quite recently adopted a repertory system, she perceives a different problem, in breaking down a suspicion on the part of older-established elements of the audience that the only good film is one which comes with subtitles. In this respect, her plan to show *Alligator* might seem an intriguing test case, since this is an overtly commercial film which received critical plaudits but did not prove a commercial success.

With 'habit' filmgoing effectively dead, if one leaves aside the occasional family outing blockbuster like *Superman* and the teenage market for schlock-horror, and with the number of both films and cinemas diminished, the town-and-gown division between general and 'discerning' viewers might paradoxically seem to have become wider. If so, then the cross-fertilisation of discrete elements of the specialist audience could be seen as a potentially important factor in the minority marketplace. But of course the subsidised sector now maintains a sizeable stake in that same territory. At time of writing, the British Film Institute provides assistance, financial and philosophical, to a total of over thirty 'public exhibition venues' (as its annual report chooses to call them). This expanding network of cinemas—the formulation 'regional film theatres' is used in conversation but is being officially discarded as having too institutional a ring—embraces with varying intensity not only most of the main British cities (Liverpool and Manchester are the chief present exceptions) but other locations as diverse as Canterbury and Kirkcaldy, Scunthorpe and Street.*

Before describing these cinemas' operations, however, it is necessary to backtrack some fifteen years. The mid-60s saw the sharpest effect of cinema closures (1,871 theatres in 1966 compared with 2,711 in 1961), but the confidently expansionist mood which in terms of changing leisure habits and enhanced property values was partly responsible for this was also expressing itself socially in a government commitment to the regions, as what had hitherto tended to be called the provinces were now, in an anti-elitist gesture, coming to be known. Not only that, but the Labour administration returned to office in 1964 became the first to appoint, in Jennie (now Baroness) Lee, a minister for the arts.

Future social historians will doubtless be ready to elaborate upon the seeming paradox that it was at the very time that the cinema ceased to be a potent mass medium that it began to be accorded widespread academic acceptance and attention. To a degree, the first wave of RFTs which came into being in the late 60s could be seen as a reflection of this, even if the no doubt apocryphal story that the Whitehall belief was that the cinemas were to show *arts* films contains a grain of symbolic truth.

In fact, practically speaking, the undertaking is deemed not to have met with great initial success. There was a mushroom growth of venues, some forty in all, many in the Home Counties and many operating on a markedly part-time basis. Cash was thinly spread and staffing minimal, and within a few years several operations had gone out of business, while others had parted company with the BFI. It was in 1974, in the upshot of an internal rejig at the Institute, that a new focus was brought to bear on the issue. This took the form of a campaign for structured and contextualised programming at the subsidised cinemas, in place of what was characterised as parochial make-do-and-mend. The development may have occasioned, amid some desultory skirmishing in the correspondence columns of *BFI News*, a few shrill allegations of hobnailed centralism against the would-be innovators.

*Direct grant aid from the BFI to those cinemas outside London which receive it will total some £150,000 in the current financial year. But more substantial funding, in overall terms, comes via the regional arts associations, the BFI's grants to which in 1982/83 will total £613,000 (an increase of almost 21 per cent on the previous year); Scottish venues are the revenue responsibility of the Scottish Film Council.

But as the latter increasingly gained the upper hand, flying the banner of what was somewhat jaw-breakingly dubbed 'professionalisation' and using the direct and indirect products of the recently expanded presence of film in higher education, consultative mechanisms were introduced to counter notions of centrally imposed control. Among other things, these processes help to determine which films the BFI can, through financial subvention, assist in bringing into availability: the re-emergence of the work of Max Ophuls is perhaps the most significant example of this tendency.

Colin McArthur, head of what, consequent upon a further internal rationalisation, has become the BFI's Distribution Division, emphasises that while he and his colleagues remain firmly attached to the 'pleasure principle' in filmgoing, there is beyond this a need to reject a merely 'passive, consumerist' view of the cinema and to promote a 'debate-centred film culture'. Relevant questions can, he maintains, be posed about almost any film, depending upon the context in which it is viewed.

The current network of BFI-supported theatres are thus, the argument runs, able to fulfil the mutually reinforcing roles of plugging the gap left by the decline of the 'private sector'—acting, even, as an embryonic equivalent to a 'third circuit' of the kind so much discussed in the past—while at the same time helping to redefine the cinema's cultural identity and function. (A film critic might reflect upon the complementary fashion in which many of the decreasing number of today's new movies tend to be self-conscious, or even self-referential, in their concerns; he might even, if of a traditionally humanist cast of thought, question whether imaginative engagement with what is on the screen might not of itself constitute an 'active' experience—but that is perhaps to venture into a rather large alternative debate.)

How, though, does the situation present itself to the filmgoer in the field? What follows are observations—in the nature of things, specific and limited—based on visits to three arbitrarily, if alliteratively, selected venues in different parts of Britain (or more accurately, if coincidentally, England).

NORWICH

The four-screen ABC is demonstrating, with a late-night preview of *I, the Jury* and a morning show of *Grease*, that the circuits still have some cards up their sleeves, while the independent semi-art house the Noverre is offering £1 Monday evening seats for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But at Cinema City, opened in 1978, a steady stream of phone bookings are coming in for *Excalibur*. Norwich also boasts an unconverted 1,200-seat Odeon, but it is from the Noverre that the real competition comes, since by having more seats it can lay claim not only to first runs of *Manhattan* or *The Last Metro* but also to second runs of circuit movies like *Tess*, pushing Cinema City into second or third place. All the same, says Kingsley Canham, Cinema City's programmer, mutual relations are quite friendly: a pooled advertising campaign among all four cinemas was being considered, and the ABC manager has complimented him on the effectiveness of the cinema's leaflet and poster campaign. Probably, though, there is no very direct competition for customers with the circuit houses.

Kingsley Canham suggests that his audience breaks into three parts: 'hard core' film buffs, who often travel a considerable distance, for Sunday revivals; young people, many of them in couples, for late-night shows; assorted middle-class professionals in their 20s and 30s for the main programmes. To what do the latter most readily respond? Not altogether surprisingly, the answer seems to be established subtitled successes: *Kagemusha*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. But if the imprimatur of the quality newspapers carries movies such as these, it does not seem to do the trick for the American cinema: the widely applauded *Melvin and Howard* did notably poor business, while the same director's (admittedly inferior) *Citizens Band* bombed to the extent of attracting but a sole spectator at one of its screenings. Another conspicuous failure, despite seeming auteurist claims to attention, was *S.O.B.* (which, ironically, was made available as a first run because of the logjam created at the ABC by the holdover of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). On the other hand, *Memoirs of a Survivor*, a flop at the ABC, will still, Kingsley Canham thinks, be a certain success at Cinema City, given that it uses nearby locations and that Julie Christie made an appearance at the cinema during the shooting.

And what do audiences ask to see? Requests are currently headed by *Trans-Europ Express* and *The Valley Obscured by Clouds* (no readily identifiable trend there) as well as the better known Marilyn Monroe vehicles. Intriguing to learn that overheard comments after a recent showing of *Some Like It Hot* intimated that many in the audience had never seen it before.

Programmes are formed loosely into seasons, and there are periodic special events, ranging recently from a selection of Jana Bokova's TV films, introduced by the director, to a country-and-western day. Programme notes are provided, in some cases expanded into booklets, a quarterly house magazine produced; there's a bookshop, and the premises house a film and video workshop. Then, too, there is participation in film studies courses at the local art school, as well as informal links with the film department at the nearby university. And currently in the works is a scheme to screen Humphrey Jennings' work at the cinema in tandem with a Jennings exhibition in the city and a large-scale campus season of British wartime cinema, an accommodation which could certainly be seen as catering for intervention at a usefully varied number of levels of commitment.

NEWCASTLE

Commercial cinemas here are fairly plentiful but seem mainly restricted to current releases, even though an outlying Classic is bravely pitching in with one-day revivals of *Now Voyager* and *Henry V*. The Tyneside Film Theatre has two auditoria, providing a mixture, judicious and multifarious, of current foreign language or semi-specialised movies and revivals in seasons of various kinds—national cinemas, directors, genres, themes. Audiences come from a wide surrounding area, says director Sheila Whitaker, and fall predominantly into the middle-class, 18–35 bracket, though weighted towards the younger end for more specialised items.

Mephisto, *The Last Metro* and *Kagemusha* have, so far as new films go, been among the main crowd pullers, in company, somewhat surprisingly, with *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, the sort of well-made, undemonstrative American film that one thinks of nowadays as tending to get lost in the shuffle. Again, *Citizens Band* proved a non-starter, and *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* did appreciably less well than expected (which might suggest that reviewers' opinions carry more weight than a director's name).

Most programmes are in double bills, a strategy which can be turned to advantage in, for instance, using *Norma Rae* as a hook to screen the documentary *Union Maids*, or teaming the fairly well known *Coming Home* with the little known *Cuba*. Sheila Whitaker is inclined to think that a comparable effect is achieved with retrospective programmes, where the comparatively large turn-out for *Senso* might be in part a function of that film's propinquity in the schedule to *Death in Venice*. She emphasises the support of the local press and other media, and draws attention to the unified publicity image the cinema projects through leaflets and posters (glossy versions of the latter, incidentally, do good business when offered for sale, demonstrating the continuing lure of movie memorabilia). Publicity is very specifically targeted, so that *Blood Wedding* would be pamphleted not simply at local dance groups but at a shop catering to dancers' needs.

Celebrity events take place quite frequently: an illustrated talk by special effects supremo Ray Harryhausen packed the large theatre (which retains a reassuring picture-house ambience, complete with balcony), though some less charismatic figure, such as a mere critic, would be more tactfully housed in the second auditorium. An annual festival has been held for the past four years; last year, when many of the films were unfamiliar

independent work, a £10 season ticket was ingeniously offered as a means of breaking down potential audience resistance.

Free lunchtime lectures take place (recent topics: the work of Michael Grigsby, sexual politics in Hitchcock), schools screenings are held, and courses operated in conjunction with the WEA and the university: Sheila Whitaker believes that ideally a full-time education officer should be attached to the staff. There are plans to start a viewing theatre and to move the existing library and well-stocked bookshop (turnover doubled in two years) to a more readily accessible position; as it is, the library attracts a flow of users, not just researchers from the university and elsewhere, but also a fair number of more casual visitors, bent on looking up the credits of last night's movie on TV.

NOTTINGHAM

This is a city with a markedly high cinematic profile—sixteen screens for a population of under 300,000—and one where, against the national trend, commercial cinema audiences were slightly up last year. It may be that this feeds into, rather than detracts from, the success of two complementary subsidised ventures, albeit that both are, roughly speaking, part-time operations.

The 450-seat Nottingham Film Theatre has been open since the first 'wave' of funded projects in the latter 60s, and has, says its organiser Doug Tansley, built up over the years a sizeable if fluctuating body of regular patrons, in addition to the (in a way, self-renewing) turnover in the local student population. Though audiences tend to be predominantly in their 20s and 30s, he observes that if anything the average age has crept up rather than down over the years.

The bill of fare is primarily, though not exclusively, based on new and/or well-known foreign language films: there has been no art house in Nottingham for a good many years, though recently the multiple Odeon has successfully shown several big name foreign movies (*Kagemusha, Maria Braun*) in its smallest auditorium, something which has tended to work against the Film Theatre's ability to give early screenings to potential draws like *Mephisto*, since distributors have an eye on the Odeon. But *The Tin Drum*, despite having been shown at the Odeon, still proved a sell-out, perhaps pointing to some degree of audience 'separatism'. Other recent successes have been *The Aviator's Wife* (a quintessential minority film) and *Bad Timing*: Roeg, it seems, is a director particularly taken to heart in this neck of the woods. The riskiest propositions tend to be American genre movies, even those with the most impeccable critical credentials: thus, a recent revival of *Convoy*, ostensibly the kind of semi-neglected but approachable film one might have expected to be welcomed, proved a stark failure.

Again, compendious and eclectic programme notes are provided free. Some films are shown for three days, others in broadly related clusters on successive evenings (e.g. *Lightning Over Water, Rebel Without a Cause, The American Friend*). To coincide with the Nottingham Festival in June, a three week event is arranged with a daily change of programme: last year, films from Italy; this year from France. Doug Tansley, however, is modestly sceptical about what he conceives as 'head office' pressure for a more overtly educational approach, believing that this tends to alienate a wider public and that, anyway, such a local function is more than adequately provided by the twin establishment round the corner.

This is the 75-seater New Cinema, located in the Midland Group centre, which also contains a performance area and two galleries. Occasional screenings of experimental and politically radical work developed with the appointment of Steve Neale as films organiser some two years ago into regular programmes. Initially these remained within a political perspective, as in a season on Third World cinema, but without forsaking this line, they have gradually broadened in range.

Thus, there has been an historically conceived season on comedy (Lenny Bruce very popular, Keaton quite popular, Peter Greenaway—alas—not popular at all) and one on colour films (a surprise success here for Minnelli's *The Cobweb*, partly, it seems, thanks to an enthusiastic preview in the now sadly defunct independent paper the *Nottingham News*; conversely, a recent showing of Sirk's *Imitation of Life* occasioned about the poorest turn-out of the year). Encouragingly, and in seeming vindication of umbrella programming, a series on eccentric cinema drew sizeable attendances not only for *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* but for *L'Age d'Or* too. While individual audience feedback may tend to the impractical—local punks constantly advocate repeats of *Jubilee* and there is someone who untiringly importunes for the unavailable work of Mario Bava—a number of programmes have been assembled in conjunction with community organisations: a Blacks in Hollywood season in liaison with the Afro-Caribbean Centre, one on gay movies with the Nottingham Campaign for Homosexual Equality.

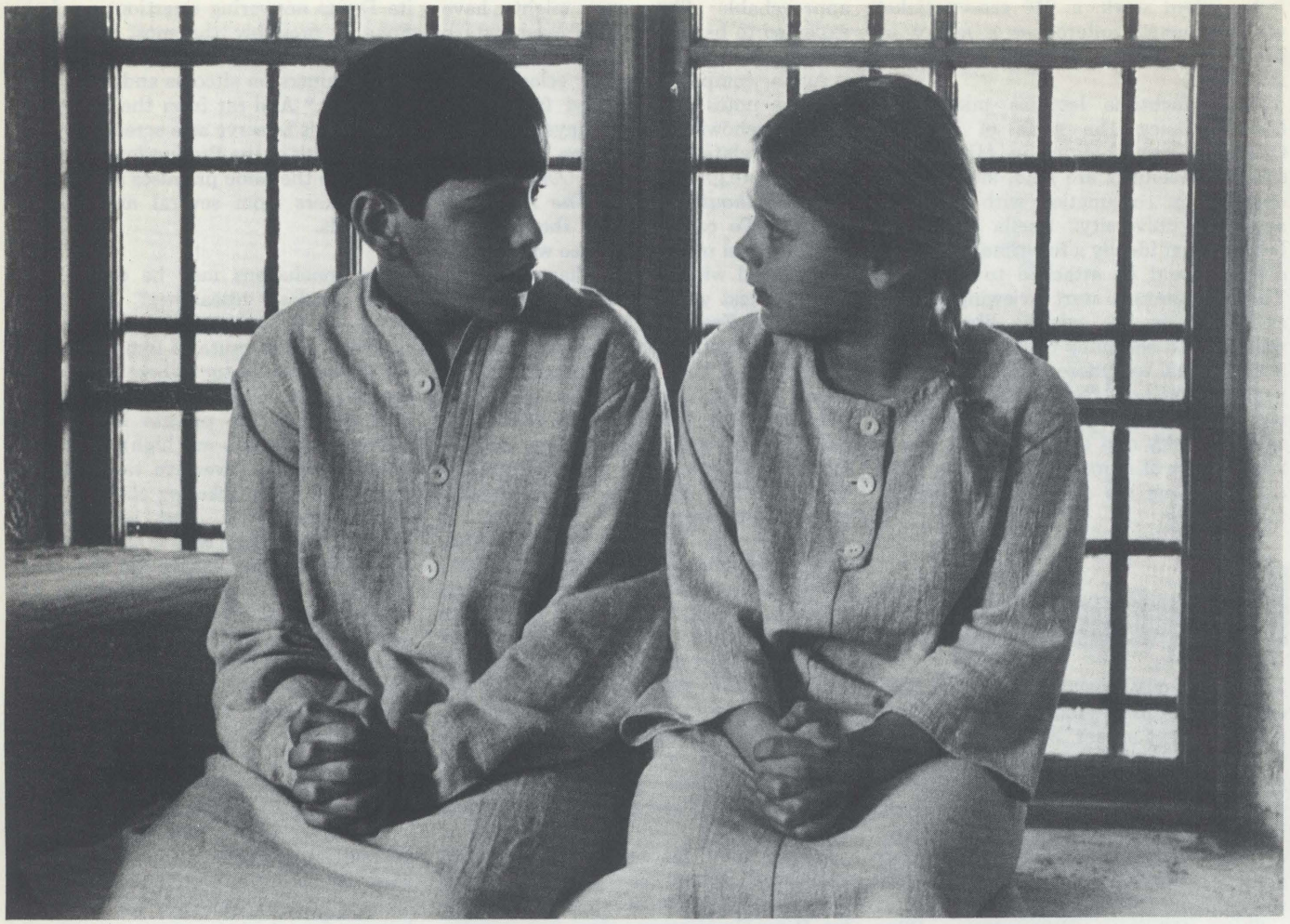
As at Norwich, a Humphrey Jennings event is planned, with screenings of his films linked both to exhibitions in the gallery and a large-scale British cinema retrospective. Discussion events and presentations are held on average once a month, not just on the cinema (Marguerite Duras answering questions on *India Song* is probably the most prestigious recent example) but also on television (e.g. seminars on sitcoms and rock music coverage).* And far from the least of its functions is to serve as a screening venue for the work of the Production Workshop housed in the same premises and used by film-makers from several areas of the Midlands.

What conclusions may be drawn from these modest researches? In human terms, certainly, there is a wide-ranging devotion to the cause of film, not just in the subsidised sector (where salaries are low) but also, and not only in the examples cited, in the private independent sector (where risks are high). In strictly practical terms, inventive techniques of promotion and marketing obviously play a significant role. And in terms of demand, it is clear that a sizeable audience still happily exists for the mainstream of art cinema, at least for *The Last Metro* or *The Tin Drum*, if not necessarily for *The Oberwald Mystery* or *The Falls*, and that to a greater or lesser degree a more limited audience can be tapped for other kinds of minority cinema (old, unfamiliar, experimental). It is worth recording that in 1980/81, RFT attendance actually increased overall, albeit by a fairly token one per cent.

Seeking to take a wider view, it seems plausible to propose that some two decades ago, the traditional cinema's lines of communication with its audiences became frayed in two ways: not only did the social demand for filmgoing sharply decline, but as the movies themselves reached, as it were, the end of their first lifetime, no devotee, however assiduous, could hope any longer to be able to absorb the generality of their past in any spontaneous sense. Regardless of the imperatives of commercial viability and/or academic theory for structured programming, the devoted filmgoer's perceptions are willy-nilly 'structured' to an increasing degree simply by the cinema's longevity.

Film culture, certainly, is alive and well, if showing some symptoms of fiscal undernourishment. But what of the cinema as a whole? No doubt, whatever developments in video and cable may bring, showcase venues will remain for any foreseeable future in the West End and in satellite equivalents in the major centres of population. But if, as overheads mount, audiences in fact continue to dwindle, the conclusive 'fail safe' point for commercial exhibition as we commonly understand it might not be all that far away. While an enlarged subsidised network might help to slow down the arrival of such a day, is it not less than realistic to imagine that it could provide any complete alternative? One can't help reflecting that, if the commercial cinema's role does indeed diminish to the point of marginality, what began life as supposed regional offshoots of the National Film Theatre may seem destined to end up as regional branches of the Museum of the Moving Image. ■

*It should be pointed out that this concern with television is not in any way unique: one of the most popular events at Newcastle had been devoted to the *South Bank Show* programme on *Nicholas Nickleby*, and at Norwich a presentation of episodes from *The Avengers*.



'Fanny and Alexander': Bertil Guve, Pernilla Allwin.

BERGMAN AT HOME

PETER COWIE watches 'Fanny and Alexander' at the Swedish Film Institute

Comforting, on one's first visit to a Bergman film set, to encounter Death in the corridor. Not the late lamented Bengt Ekerot from *The Seventh Seal*, but a lanky extra adjusting his grisly mask and fondling his scythe prior to entering Stages 1 and 2 of the studios in the basement of the Swedish Film Institute. Nearby, a dishevelled man-at-arms tucks his chin into his breastplate and dozes on a bench. An imperious woman strolls past, her breasts slashed—with scarlet make-up. Two harlequins are playing a desultory game of gin rummy. A bell shrills, and everyone springs into life. Scores of extras, barefoot and clothed in ragged fustian, troop into the well-lit sound stage. Harriet Andersson, long a denizen of Bergman's world, waits patiently as more paint is applied to the stigmata in her palms. Dressed in a long black robe, with hair drawn up in a bun and turn-of-the-century spectacles, she looks formidable, straight out of a dream by Strindberg.

Bergman is home. After five years of self-imposed exile in Munich, he has directed what he claims will be his last Swedish film, *Fanny and Alexander*, due to be released to cinemas in December and to reach the TV screen as a mini-series during 1983. Bergman has mellowed over the years. The strain of the upheaval that followed the trumped-up tax scandal of 1976 shows in his face and figure. Suddenly, he looks his 63 years. The hair, once sleek and black, is grey and wispy; the shoulders stooped. Yet there is something grand about the way he orchestrates these dream sequences. The pale, curvilinear walls of the set assume the contours of a metaphorical desert, across which the wind and sand whirl in the face of the peasants and dancers who caper their way towards the camera, Death bringing up the rear. 'Come on, come on!' cries Bergman. He seems enveloped by the host of extras, but remains atop the camera dolly, hair tossed by the blast from a wind machine. Then, the take completed, there is a quick consultation with Sven Nykvist, Bergman's veteran cinematographer (28 films in partnership). As the extras shuffle back to the base-line, the hush descends once more, cathedral-like.

Minutes later, it is the turn of the flagellants, dancers trained to contort their bodies and lash at one another without actually making contact. They keen and wail, thrash and groan, while a monk with a drum beats out a menacing rhythm. After three takes, the air thick with smoke from the censers, Bergman laughs with the others as one frenzied flagellant goes on screaming after her colleagues have stopped. 'It's a quote from *The Seventh Seal*,' he says with a grin. Then, rather more seriously: 'I first saw these flagellants as a child; my

grandmother had a marvellous edition of the works of Sir Walter Scott, and there they were, and all that imagery made a huge impression on me.'

Beside him stands Daniel Bell, a jocular expatriate Scot who will be responsible for the music in *Fanny and Alexander*. He listens to the strange incantations and casts about for inspiration. 'I've got to strike a contrast with the terrible poverty and humiliation that religion has brought to these flagellants,' he says. 'The score will have to summon up the ideological vision of Christianity, angels and all that.' Meanwhile, Bergman is addressing the crowd: 'Beat harder!' he urges the flagellants. 'Flick with your wrists. No limp movements. Sometimes it's obvious that you're faking.' Then, as the assistant director Peter Schildt shepherds them back, Bergman strolls off on his own, whistling quietly.

It is an economic miracle that *Fanny and Alexander* has reached this stage at all. After the success of *Autumn Sonata*, Bergman's unlikely patron Lord Grade was eager to establish a long-term artistic relationship with the Swedish director. Two hammer blows descended on this marriage of convenience. First, *From the Life of the Marionettes* opened to mixed reviews and total public apathy. Second, Bergman's screenplay for *Fanny and Alexander* ran to several hundred pages. Grade and his associate Martin Starger were aghast, and scarcely mollified by Bergman's cheerful suggestion that he make a five-hour film for television and a separate cinema version of about 2 hours 45 minutes. Grade and Starger insisted on a maximum length of 2 hours 15 minutes for the theatrical release; Bergman demurred. 'The marriage,' he says, 'was dead and cold, and we had no backer for *Fanny and Alexander*.'

Enter Jörn Donner. Having read the script with mounting enthusiasm Donner, with characteristic audacity, invited Bergman to make the film in Stockholm, using the studios of the Swedish Film Institute (of which he was then managing director). Donner, having extended this invitation without consulting his board, was faced with the task of raising some 30 million crowns (approximately £2,850,000) in the year before shooting was to begin, in September 1981. For a Swedish production, the logistics appeared insuperable: 1,200 extras, 140 characters, at least 60 speaking roles, a 25-week schedule . . .

But Donner went to work with a will. German television, in the shape of ZDF in Mainz, was prevailed upon to invest heavily in the project, thanks in part to the intervention of Horst Wendlandt, a long-time admirer of Bergman who had shared with Dino De Laurentiis the production credit on *The Serpent's Egg*. Then Gaumont, the most powerful conglomerate in French cinema, and with a president, Daniel Toscan du Plantier, who had long been known as a devotee of Pantheon directors, as well as an astute businessman, stepped in with more production guarantees. Bergman's own company in Munich, Personafilm, joined the investment roster, and Donner drew upon an impressive network of international contacts to sell *Fanny and Alexander* in advance to certain key territories—the BBC, for example, have purchased rights to the TV series.

Donner feels it unlikely that ever again can such an expensive Swedish production be mounted. In spite of his mustering of outside capital, Donner became the target of ferocious attacks in the Swedish press for his alleged damage to the Film Institute's economy. He maintains that the Swedes are getting good value for their share of the budget—a five or six-part TV series, plus a major cinema release. Not to mention employment for scores of technicians during more than half a year, and the sense of the Institute's studios being tested to the limit.

Bergman himself was sceptical about the technical resources of the Film Institute. Working at the Bavaria Studios outside Munich, he had been reminded of the halcyon days of Svensk Filmindustri, when so many gifted designers and wardrobe experts had been on the staff out at Solna. 'I was convinced it was not possible to film *Fanny and Alexander* in Sweden,' he admits, 'and I have been delightfully surprised.' Four sound stages were brought into play, two at the Film Institute and two at Europa Film in Bromma. Even then, the production designers, led by Anna Asp, had to perform miracles of improvisation and compression. Marik Vos-Lundh supervised a team of seventeen costumiers and seamstresses. There were 260 leading costumes to be made, each of which had to be tested and approved by Bergman, working with his still photographer, Arne Carlsson. 'Then we needed 400 for the big funeral sequence,' says Miss Vos-Lundh, 'and 350 more for the theatre scenes.'

The reconciliation with Sweden was unexpectedly warm. Early location excursions for *Fanny and Alexander* had the air of a public fête, with Bergman being ogled and applauded like royalty as he supervised scenes in the streets of Uppsala. 'He is so much more at ease here at home than he was making *From the Life of the Marionettes* in Munich,' says his wife Ingrid. 'Directing in German was extremely taxing.'

Bergman was brought up in Uppsala, living at the home of his maternal grandmother. This university town is the setting for *Fanny and Alexander*, which depicts Swedish high society at the close of the last century and in the first years of the twentieth. The Ekdahl family rules the roost, owning the town's much valued theatre, and coming into gradual conflict with the fire and brimstone Bishop, Edvard Vergérus (Bergman likes to use the same names in film after film, as a kind of private joke). One of the movie's high points will be the Bishop's death by immolation, expiring in flames after his bed has been set alight ('We damned near burned down the entire studio!' recalls Bergman).

Alexander, played by Bertil Guve, is twelve, and his young sister Fanny is ten, and clearly there is an autobiographical tinge to the scenes of their discovering the delights of a magic lantern and the mysteries of their grandmother's home. Bergman's sister Margareta (married to the translator Paul Britten Austin and an author in her own right) is in fact four years younger than him, and confirms that she helped him build his first toy theatre. Bergman prefers to site himself elsewhere in the film: 'There's a lot of me in the Bishop, rather than in Alexander. He's haunted by his own devils.' And to reinforce the family atmosphere, the film's vast credit list is speckled with Bergmans—Anna, Ingmar's daughter, as the *ingénue* Hanna Schwartz; Mats, his son, as Aron; Käbi Laretei, a former wife, as Aunt Anna; Daniel, their son, as grip; and his present wife, Ingrid, helping with production matters.

Contractual difficulties have led to the absence from *Fanny and Alexander* of several archetypal Bergman names: Max von Sydow, who might well have played the Bishop, and Liv Ullmann, who might have appeared in the coveted role of Emilie Ekdahl, now taken by Sweden's most lauded actress of the moment, Ewa Fröling. But Erland Josephson is back, as the antique dealer, Isak Jacobi. So too are Gunnar Björnstrand, as the doyen among actors at the theatre, and Jarl Kulle, as Gustav Adolf Ekdahl.

Fanny and Alexander, part comedy, part tragedy, part farce and part horror show, will be much less claustrophobic and intense than Bergman's recent films. 'It's not so much a chronicle,' he says, 'as a Gobelin tapestry, from which you can pick the images and the incidents and the characters that fascinate you.' The film was conceived as Bergman was pondering on a conversation he had had with his friend Kjell Grede (director of *Hugo and Josephine* and *Harry Munter*). Grede had taken Bergman gently to task for producing grim and depressing pictures when in private he patently relished life and found parts of it so amusing. Bergman decided to show the world that he too liked entertainment. The dichotomy between his genial personality and his anguished work appears to stem from childhood. While Bertil Guve kicks a ball around the set during takes, Bergman

sits on an upturned drum and remembers: 'There was a very twisted atmosphere in my home. Sometimes it was happy, very amusing, we liked to play games, play theatre, play music. When my father was in a good mood, he was a wonderful man. But when he had his depressions, then the mood was certainly very heavy. As children we could never understand the abruptness of these changes. *Fanny and Alexander* is not about my childhood, but parts of my childhood are lodged within it.'

Towards the end of last year, the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* pounced on a remark Bergman had made about retiring from the cinema. The BBC were intending to feature the declaration in *Newsnight* until a call to Mrs Bergman in Stockholm elicited, if not an outright denial, at least a cautious remonstration to the effect that he might make another film in Germany but would then take it easy. When one asks him directly about the rumours, however, Bergman attests to their accuracy: 'I will do some 50-minute TV plays, and perhaps another opera like *The Magic Flute*, but I prefer to leave film-making to younger people. In earlier days, when I made those pronouncements about each film being my last, I said so with quite a different emphasis. I was a financial catastrophe, and I never knew when I would be forced to quit the industry. But now I need too much energy,' and he gestures vaguely at the huge studio and the milling figures amid the glaring klieg lights. 'Besides,' he adds, 'it can never be more fun than it is now.' ■

FANNY AND ALEXANDER

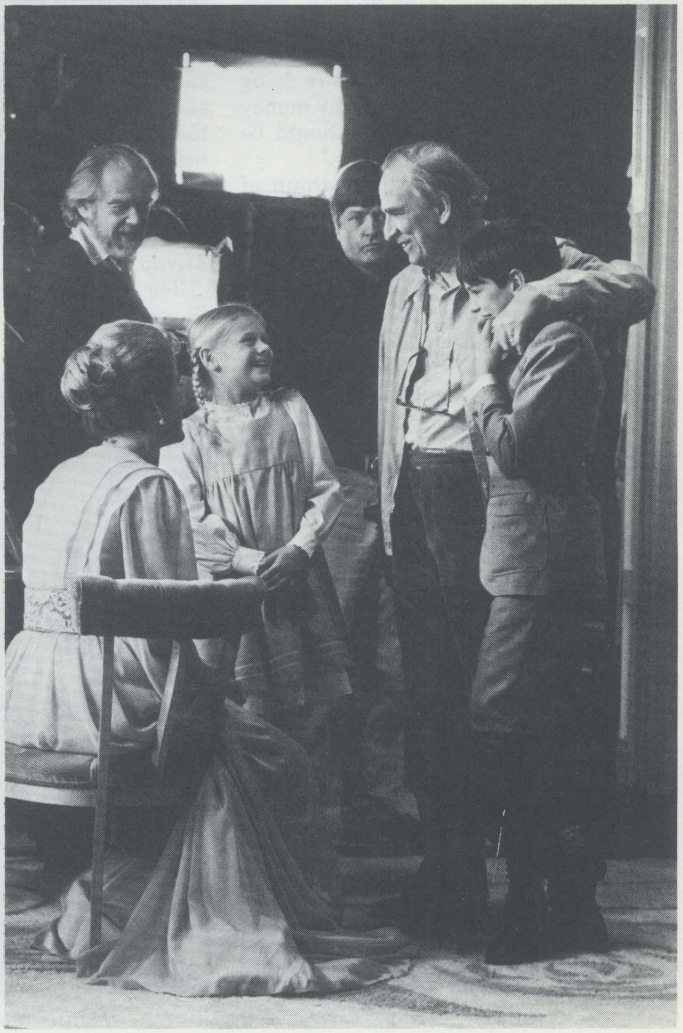
Far left: Pernilla Allwin, Bertil Guve.

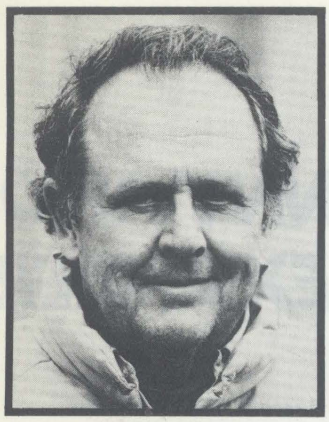
Left: Jan Malmsjö, Ewa Fröling.

Below left: Ingmar Bergman, Ewa Fröling, Allan Edwall, Gunn Wallgren.

Centre: Family prayers, Bergman with his child actors, Jan Malmsjö and Ewa Fröling.

Below: 'The dichotomy between his genial personality and his anguished work . . .'





Emile de Antonio (left), the scourge of Joe McCarthy (*Point of Order*, 1963) and Richard Nixon (*Millhouse: A White Comedy*, 1973) and the investigator of the Weathermen (*Underground*, 1976), has again taken to the lists. Here he talks to DAVID SEGAL about *In the King of Prussia*, his documentary on the Catholic pacifists the Plowshares Eight, which will be screened in Britain on Channel Four.

De Antonio and the Plowshares Eight

When he was first asked to make a film about the Plowshares Eight, Emile de Antonio refused. Since completing *Underground*, he had been at work on several autobiographical projects. A Plowshares Eight film was, he thought, a project for someone younger, but he relented after seeing that no one else was going to do it. 'I knew I was on the right track when I discovered I couldn't raise a penny. My documentary films have cost a total of $1.2m. I've never had any trouble raising money. I pick up the phone and talk to Mr So-and-So. Now Mr So-and-So who, say, gave me $50,000 for *Millhouse* writes me a very nice letter: "Dear D, I think what you're doing is *so* important but, you know, my money is elsewhere. I think the film should be made . . .", but not even a dollar.'

The Plowshares Eight are a group of eight Catholic activists, including the Reverend Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip. On 9 September 1980, they got into the Re-Entry Division of the General Electric Space Technology Centre in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, damaged several nose cones with ball-peen hammers and poured blood on secret documents. In de Antonio's screenplay, GE's head of security describes what happened next: 'At that point they stopped and they all joined hands and started to chant hymns, I guess. I really wasn't listening.'

Arriving in Norristown, PA, where the trial of the Eight was to take place, de Antonio immediately sought permission to film it. This was denied because, he suggests, 'They will never allow a political trial to be televised, and particularly not when the people in it are sharp, hard opponents of the government and, as in the case of Daniel Berrigan, highly articulate. In Florida, where they have broadcast a trial, it was a murder case. They might even someday do a Tarnower-Harris case because that would satisfy the public appetite for scandal and avoid the need to look at substantive issues. The issue raised by the Plowshares Eight is whether or not we choose to survive.'

Unable to cover the trial itself, de Antonio shot what he could around it: defendants; witnesses; jurors; lawyers planning their strategy; events surrounding the central one. In New York, during July 1981, he also shot a re-creation of the trial based on a screenplay he culled from the 1,100-page court transcript. The Plowshares Eight played themselves, and actors the others. The shooting schedule was limited to two and a half days so that the defendants could have time with their families before being sentenced and sent to jail. (The Berrigans were sentenced to three to ten years; the other six received shorter sentences.) Instead of shooting in a courtroom, which he could easily have done, de Antonio used a theatre and designed a set that was neither bizarre, expressionistic nor grotesque, 'but just one remove from reality'. The director of photography was Judy Irola, the cinematographer of *Northern Lights*.

The judge was played by Martin Sheen. De Antonio had met Sheen when the latter, together with a number of prominent Hollywood people, had signed a statement supporting de Antonio's refusal to give information about the Weather Underground during the filming of *Underground*. Sheen carried his enthusiasm for the project beyond the production itself. After shooting, he wrote to the judge whose part he had just played asking for mercy in the sentencing of the Plowshares Eight, a plea that went unheard. (Another side of Sheen's dedication was revealed by the fact that he once kept his jacket on under his judge's robes even though the air conditioner had broken and the temperature, according to de Antonio, had risen to 115 degrees.)

The screenplay, which has the relevant page numbers of the transcript in the margins, picks its emphasis. The prosecution and the judge consistently ruled out any attempt to widen the focus of the trial. 'Nuclear warfare is not on trial here,' the judge tells the defendants, 'you are.' He is concerned with the threat to

Daniel and Philip Berrigan at a preliminary hearing. Photo: UPI.

GE's property, not the threat to mankind's safety. One is made aware, too, of the use of language. The representatives of General Electric refused to call the damaged objects 'nose cones', referring to them instead as the more neutral 'hardware'.

Before the judge disallowed the defence of justification, the Committee for the Plowshares Eight had flown in experts to discuss in court the issues of nuclear war. These included George Wald, the Harvard biologist and Nobel Prize winner; Richard Falk, a professor of international law at Princeton; psychiatrist Robert Lifton, author of a book on the survivors of Hiroshima; Daniel Ellsberg of the Pentagon Papers; and David Dellinger, one of the Chicago Seven. Unable to appear at the trial, these experts testified for de Antonio's camera.

The centrepiece of the screenplay is a speech by Daniel Berrigan: 'I don't know whether you have ever smelled cancer. Cancer of the nose, cancer of the face, which is the most terrible to look upon and to smell, cancer of the brain, cancer of the lungs: we see it all, smell it all, hold it all in our arms. This is not just a little kind of lecture on cancer. It is a lecture on *those*. Those things make cancer the destiny of humanity. This is another aspect of justification.

'We know now that 35 years ago, roughly, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, those that did not die immediately, at the flash point, are still dying of cancer. These things carry a universal plague of cancer to the point where, as the Book of Revelation says, the living will envy the dead after one of these falls. The living will envy the dead. I could not understand cancer until I was arrested at the Pentagon, because there I smelled death by cancer, if you understand what I mean, in my soul. I smelled death of everyone by cancer, everyone, across the board, enemies, friends, black, brown, red, all of us, death by cancer.'

When Berrigan delivered this speech on set, a round of applause broke out. Later, Sheen showed a videotape of the speech to a group in Hollywood. They wanted to know who the 'actor' was, and if he could be brought out to Hollywood. De Antonio concluded: 'Of course it was Dan Berrigan who is 60 years old and has been a priest since he was eighteen . . . and who has had no acting experience.'

EMILE DE ANTONIO: 'The Plowshares Eight project is a film, even though it is made on tape. I mean, it's not like that videotape garbage you see on television. Its intentions are different, it's not industrial product. This is the first time I've worked with videotape. I've never liked it and I still don't. I'm driven to this position by economic necessity. It's very hard to make independent left-wing documentaries now, particularly if, like me, you will not go to foundations or film funds, or make a deal with PBS in advance, because I don't want anybody to have any right to censor. I don't want their advice or comments.

'The democratic approach is nullified in the United States by the most powerful of the media, television. The news on television is built upon the newscaster as media star. And it's not the real news. Nothing is clearer than something that happened a long time ago, and that the networks to this day defend. They said that the war in Vietnam was the only war that was shown on TV every day. True. But what was being shown was the media doing their own thing.

'Cameramen were shown going in and filming, and they would show bombing runs. All the film that was shown was sanitised. It appeared between commercials. Appearing between commercials, looking at it day after day, it became just another daily event. The horror of killing Vietnamese, of watching a Marine sergeant set fire to a house, of watching an American die with a bullet in him, desensitised us to death. Television did that to us because it never took a stand. Under the myth of objectivity, it presented this garbage. The whole history of the war in Vietnam is in the out-takes of ABC, which are all saved. But they broadcast three to five minutes a night. They broadcast "high events". They didn't show villagers dying of starvation, they showed their own reporters interviewing General Thieu, or they showed an air strike.

'This began a long time ago, and people thirty years old or younger have been raised totally under the spell of television. Every poll that is financed, from any point of view, makes the point that almost all information for the majority of people about what goes on in the world comes from television. All that is highly distorted, it's vicarious, it's unreal. And it's spoken to you by someone in whom the network has a tremendous vested interest. And if they want to kill you entirely, as they did the Plowshares Eight, they don't put you on. This event was not on ABC, NBC or CBS. The Berrigans are two well-known people who led six others into this extraordinary event, the first act of "disarmament" since World War Two anywhere in the world. You would think that it would be worth a minute of network newstime, but it wasn't.

'I saw the TV trucks there, the days and nights I taped, the night the sheriffs went crazy and roughed up spectators right outside the court. The trucks were there, the cables were there, and the one-inch equipment was there, and they filmed it. But they didn't televise it. They shot interviews, they shot all kinds of stuff, it's all there, somewhere, on videotape, unless the tapes have been wiped which is also possible. But it simply wasn't broadcast. If you're not televised, you're dead, you don't exist. I think Marshall McLuhan was a silly professor of literature who wrote early about TV and who made TV people themselves feel powerful and wonderful. He said "The medium is the message." It should read, "Who owns the medium owns the message." And who owns these TV stations? There are members of RCA's board of directors who are part of GE's board of directors, and General Motors' board of directors, and other companies making tanks, atomic weapons and all kinds of other things. Do they even *want* to tell the truth, do they even want to report on the fact that a thermonuclear nose cone plant has been attacked by pacifists?

'We go on thinking of dollars, with the market rising, with money our chief concern, with wars in Latin America that we're getting ready to undertake. Nobody in the government has stopped to ask what will happen, because the Soviets are just as capable as we are of launching this thing. We all know about this, but we don't want to know. This massive brainwashing has gone on, but it's also a massive self-brainwashing. Nobody wants to see himself fried out in the middle of the street, or his children. Another thing that people know in their minds but don't want to confront is that everybody believes it's going to happen to somebody else. This is one time that's

Four of the Plowshares Eight at the King of Prussia plant. Laserphoto.

wrong. Death here is much more democratic, in that people who don't die immediately, and even those who don't die slowly in agony over a period of weeks, will die within a moderate length of time. The ionosphere is going to be filled with caesium, strontium, plutonium, all these things have half-lives, some of them go on for thousands of years.

'What this is really about, and what the Plowshares Eight are really about, is that this thing—this self-brainwashing—is deep into everybody's unconscious. People are constantly aware of the fact that this could happen tomorrow. It occurs to us all the time, but we don't allow it to come out. It's like a mass hypnosis: we are hypnotised by ourselves, by our government and primarily by the tube. We don't want to think about it, we don't want to hear about it. And we don't hear about it.'

These remarks by de Antonio reminded me of the conclusion of Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Mankind's 'self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.' I mentioned this to him.

'And as something that is happening to other people. We experience the end of the world as a spectator. You can take Benjamin's brilliant essay and extend it a step. We project it now as the person looking at the TV set, and the people in the TV set are everybody else in the world. We *feel* that we're going to die, but we don't perceive it. That's the other part of our unconscious, that we block the perception that it is *our* reality. We see ourselves as the spectator and not as part of the spectacle. That is because we're trained from childhood to be spectators. We look at things, we don't do things any more. That's why Andy Warhol is the most expressive personality of our time. He's the greatest voyeur of all time. He can get people to do anything in front of his camera. Things that you would never dream of doing, you will do in front of him. Things that are degrading.

'Andy gets people to do everything. Including having other people rewrite the history of the world in his name. He said to me, "Oh, D, I had dinner at this banquet for Ronald Reagan, it was so wonderful. All those great old people were there, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra." You think he's making fun of it all, and at the same time you know that he's serious. He means both. He knows how dreary and shallow it is.

'Finally, all that will be left will be a TV set, which will keep running the images of the end of the world. The camera will be running somewhere after the guy who had it in his hand was fried. The transmitter will work, it's immune, and the set is immune. So that will be the trinity: camera, transmitter, TV receiver. The images will go on and on, the same images over and over, until the tubes burn out. And then silence will fall upon the earth.' ■

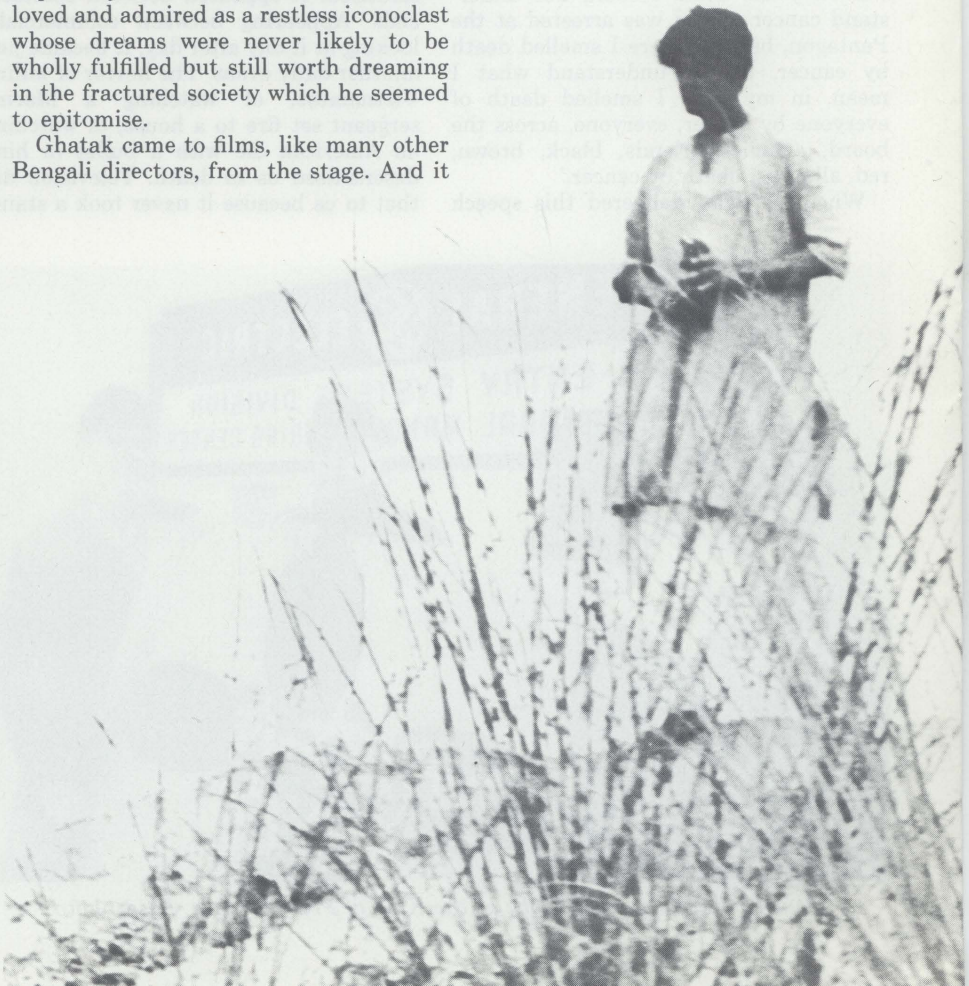
TIG

Of all India's many comparatively unsung directors, Ritwik Ghatak (1926–76) was possibly the most obviously talented. Yet he made only a handful of films, the first of which, *Nagarik* (*The Citizen*), was completed in 1952 but unreleased until after his death from chronic alcoholism and tuberculosis at the age of 51.

The first occasion a group of Western critics was able to look at the body of his work was at the Madras Festival in January 1978. The prints were tattered, the subtitles virtually unreadable when they were there at all and the projection was below even Indian standards. But the impact of the films on all present was considerable. Here, we all felt, was a passionate and intensely national filmmaker who seemed to have found his way without much access to the work of others but who was most certainly of international calibre. Two years after his death he was already a legend—as a radical intellectual who had destroyed himself but whose career had also been blighted by the circumstances of his life as an emotional refugee, and by the refusal of the establishment to recognise his talent. Arrogant, overbearing and hopelessly unreliable, he was also much loved and admired as a restless iconoclast whose dreams were never likely to be wholly fulfilled but still worth dreaming in the fractured society which he seemed to epitomise.

Ghatak came to films, like many other Bengali directors, from the stage. And it was almost certainly the experience of the war years in undivided Bengal that encouraged him to leave the theatre for the screen. He was a radical from the Indian People's Theatre and the Communist Party who felt strongly the pull of a more widely influential medium. Having written, directed and acted in travelling theatre, moving from village to village and town to town, his urge after the traumatic experience of Partition was to reach as large an audience as possible. Totally shattered himself by Partition, since his roots were in that part of Bengal which had now become foreign territory, Ghatak's sense of urgency never left him.

It also played a considerable part in destroying him, since few of his projects reached the wider audience he hoped for them. This was essentially because they were too difficult and too sophisticated. But whereas Satyajit Ray was encouraged to continue not as much by local success as by international acclaim, Ghatak's *Ajantrik* (*Pathetic Fallacy*) was sent to the Venice Festival two years after *Pather Panchali* only to be vetoed



ER

The films of RITWIK GHATAK

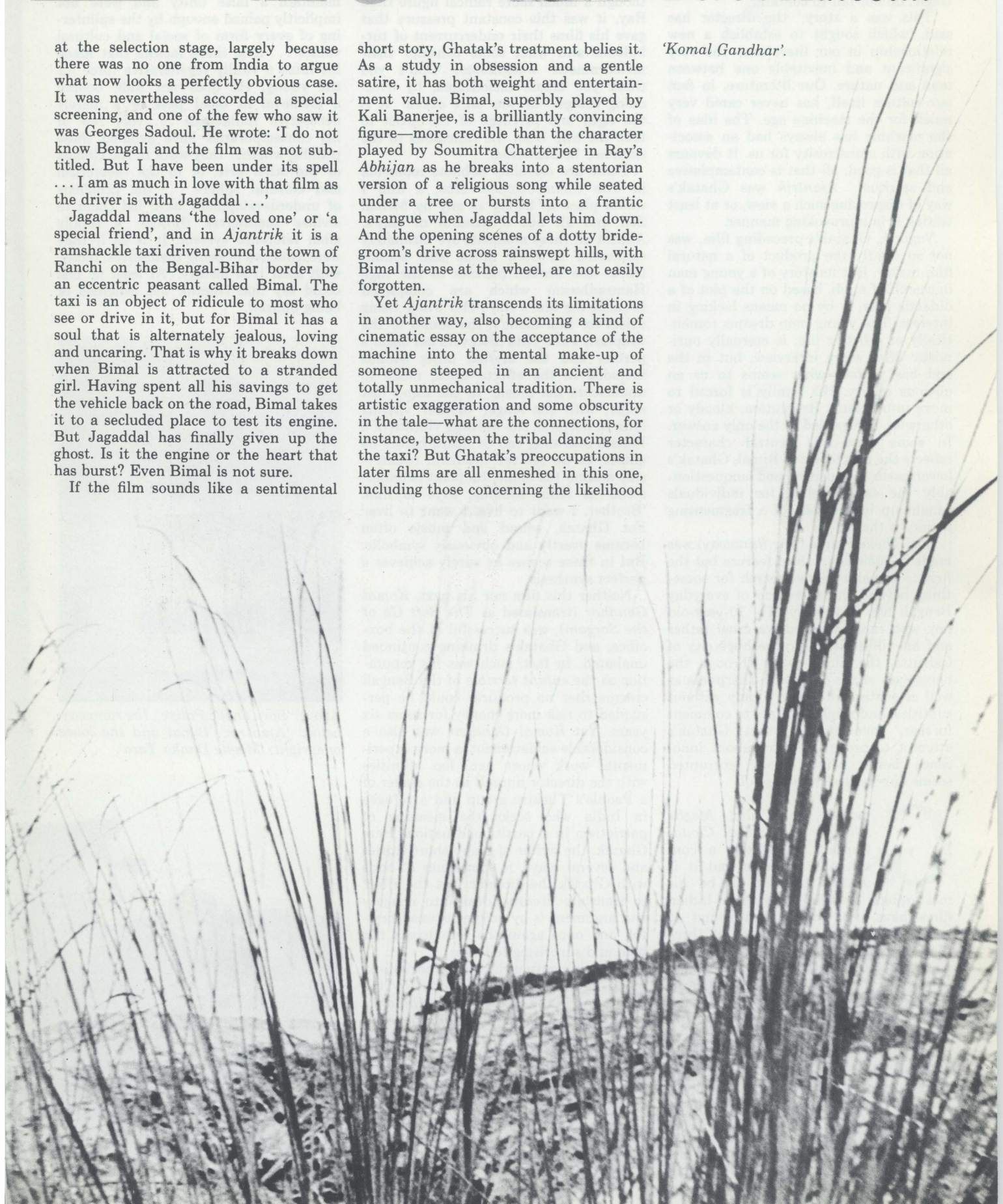
Derek Malcolm

at the selection stage, largely because there was no one from India to argue what now looks a perfectly obvious case. It was nevertheless accorded a special screening, and one of the few who saw it was Georges Sadoul. He wrote: 'I do not know Bengali and the film was not subtitled. But I have been under its spell . . . I am as much in love with that film as the driver is with Jagaddal . . .'

Jagaddal means 'the loved one' or 'a special friend', and in *Ajantrik* it is a ramshackle taxi driven round the town of Ranchi on the Bengal-Bihar border by an eccentric peasant called Bimal. The taxi is an object of ridicule to most who see or drive in it, but for Bimal it has a soul that is alternately jealous, loving and uncaring. That is why it breaks down when Bimal is attracted to a stranded girl. Having spent all his savings to get the vehicle back on the road, Bimal takes it to a secluded place to test its engine. But Jagaddal has finally given up the ghost. Is it the engine or the heart that has burst? Even Bimal is not sure.

If the film sounds like a sentimental short story, Ghatak's treatment belies it. As a study in obsession and a gentle satire, it has both weight and entertainment value. Bimal, superbly played by Kali Banerjee, is a brilliantly convincing figure—more credible than the character played by Soumitra Chatterjee in Ray's *Abhijan* as he breaks into a stentorian version of a religious song while seated under a tree or bursts into a frantic harangue when Jagaddal lets him down. And the opening scenes of a dotty bridegroom's drive across rainswept hills, with Bimal intense at the wheel, are not easily forgotten.

Yet *Ajantrik* transcends its limitations in another way, also becoming a kind of cinematic essay on the acceptance of the machine into the mental make-up of someone steeped in an ancient and totally unmechanical tradition. There is artistic exaggeration and some obscurity in the tale—what are the connections, for instance, between the tribal dancing and the taxi? But Ghatak's preoccupations in later films are all enmeshed in this one, including those concerning the likelihood



'Komal Gandhar'.

of betrayal either by fate or human perfidy, and his ideas about the continuity of life. At the end of *Ajantrik*, with the taxi's death caused by a betrayal that makes the machine seem after all rather more reliable than its human counterparts, a small boy plays with its discarded horn. It is a note of affirmation practically all Ghatak's films, however tragic, do not fail to contain.

'This was a story,' the director has said, 'which sought to establish a new relationship in our literature—the very significant and inevitable one between man and nature. Our literature, in fact our culture itself, has never cared very much for the machine age. The idea of the machine has always had an association with monstrosity for us. It devours all that is good, all that is contemplative and spiritual.' *Ajantrik* was Ghatak's way of disproving such a view, or at least testing it in a provoking manner.

Nagarik, Ghatak's preceding film, was not so clearly the product of a natural film-maker. But its story of a young man in search of a job, based on the plot of a didactic play, is by no means lacking in interest. The young man dreams romantically of a better life, is eternally optimistic after every interview, but in the end has to face what seems to us an obvious reality. His family is forced to move into a slum. Revolution, bloody or otherwise, is regarded as the only answer. In some ways the central character reflects the perplexity of Bimal, Ghatak's lower caste taxi-driver, and unquestionably the same feeling for individuals caught up in the toils of a fragmenting society is there.

Bari Theke Paliye (*The Runaway*) was made in 1959 as his third feature but the first to signal a deeper search for something beyond the alienation of everyday Bengali life. The story of a 10-year-old boy who runs away from a cruel father and his village home to the huge city of Calcutta, the film is seen through the naive eyes of the child with sharpness as well as sentiment. I saw it only without subtitles, and would hesitate to comment further, save to say that Ghatak's attempt to prove his point about innocence never being wholly corrupted seems only partially successful.

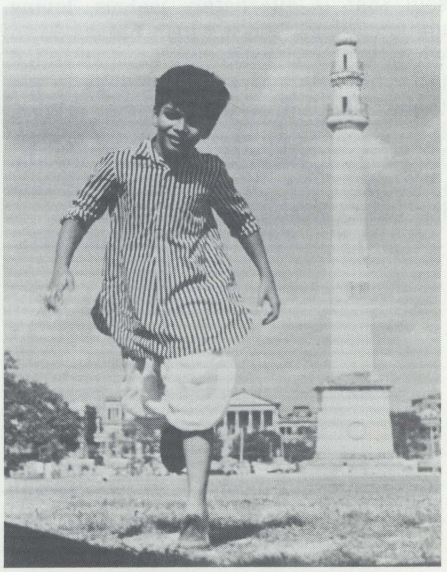
Ghatak's next film, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-Capped Star*), was a considerable advance and it is usually thought to be his masterpiece. Certainly few other Indian films have used music and sound to better effect. It was the first of three films on what was for him the highly personal theme of the plight of refugees from East Pakistan, and vocal music is integrated into the story, setting the mood for hope and despair. The central character is Nita, who virtually sacrifices her life to keep her family together even when she realises that the man she loves, and who professes to love her, is about to marry her more sensual sister. All this is watched by Shankar, her musician brother who eventually leaves home, returning to find Nita in a sanatorium. The film has some almost Chekovian subtleties and an Ibsenite sense of passion while remaining completely Indian. And although its tone is very different from that of Satyajit Ray, it can clearly be seen that Ghatak's urgency is underpinned by the same Tagorean verities. 'No national art can be built without reclaiming tradition,' he once said, and, though a much more radical figure than Ray, it was this constant pressure that gave his films their undercurrent of turbulence and what some consider their melodramatic weaknesses. 'Don't you think you create melodrama, by overdoing things?' he was once asked. 'It is the right and privilege of the artist to take the leap from the ridiculous to the sublime,' he answered.

There are certainly sublime moments in *The Cloud-Capped Star*, a film I would place as highly as any by Mrinal Sen and all but a handful of Ray's. Almost all these moments are intimately connected to both music and soundtrack—the broken phrases of the raga Hamsadhwani which are completed towards the film's end ('Her whole being exists for him alone'), the sound of the whiplash when Nita discovers her sister's perfidy and the myriad other sounds included in the effects track, made to underscore the music. In the film's last scene, with the singer brother visiting Nita in hospital, the warning vibrato of a Pahadi folk song can be heard before he enters, as we see the beautiful countryside around the clinic. Its point is understood as Nita, sobbing, says to him: 'Brother, I want to live. I want to live.' For Ghatak, sound and music often became overtly and obviously symbolic. But in these scenes he surely achieves a perfect synthesis.

Neither this film nor his next, *Komal Gandhar* (translated as *The Soft Ga of the Sargam*), was successful at the box-office, and Ghatak's drinking continued unabated. In fact, such was his reputation as the *enfant terrible* of the Bengali cinema that no producer could be persuaded to risk more money for some six years. Yet *Komal Gandhar* was also a considerable achievement, a more experimental work whose hero has affinities with the director himself as the leader of a People's Theatre group and a refugee in India who seeks the meaning of patriotism in a partitioned nation. Here Ghatak, the writer of many short stories and several plays, is sometimes at odds with Ghatak the director, but the effort to translate literary ideas into imagery and argument is by no means unsuccessful, and once again the soundtrack has bold and surprising felicities.

After this outpouring of his social and moral concerns, largely rejected by the public and in the case of *Komal Gandhar* by many of his colleagues in the communist theatre movement, Ghatak made only one film, *Suvarnarekha*, for over a decade. At a time when he should have been most prolific, his life degenerated into a series of excursions with the bottle, relieved by one year as vice principal of the Poona Film Institute, where his students often remember him as a kind of eccentric uncle who nevertheless was able to inspire a new wave of film-makers—such as Kumar Shahani and Mani Kaul.

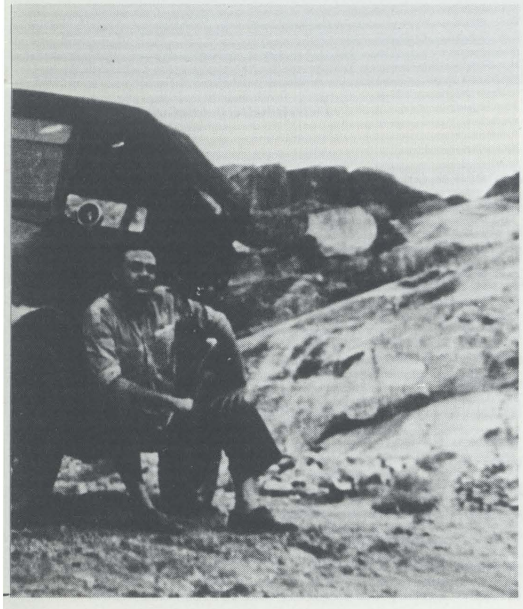
Shahani has paid eloquent tribute to him. 'At the time I met him in the early 60s he had already rejected the mechanistic and somewhat alienated modes of some of his colleagues. He was extremely disenchanted with those who wanted to maintain a false unity and were not implicitly pained enough by the splintering of every form of social and cultural values ... it is these factors that made his films a vitally regenerative force for the young. He does not hide behind a medieval or dead past or a merely decorative Indianness ... very few of his contemporaries have avoided these pitfalls, whether they work in the cinema or the other arts, or in the theoretical and cultural sphere ... the problems of underdevelopment have led them to civilise themselves through a totally alien reference system. It is as if they were ashamed of being themselves, today, with their true history.' At least no one could say that Ghatak was ashamed of being himself.



Above: 'Bari Theke Paliye', the runaway: below: 'Ajantrik', Bimal and the loved one; right: 'Meghe Dhaka Tara'.

Suvarnarekha is the most fragmented of his three films about the refugees and as anathema to some of his radical friends as *Komal Gandhar*. It suggested that there was no political answer to Partition and that the resulting spiritual confusion could not easily be resolved. The deep sense of waste is sharply expressed and the film itself Ghatak's most brutal description yet of the social consequences of a political act. Even so, life begins again for the hero of the tragedy, with his sister's child looking forward to a better life on the banks of the Suvarnarekha river. And certainly the film remained visually and aurally one of Ghatak's most exciting achievements. In particular, his camera roams an abandoned airstrip and the riverside with unsentimental eloquence, and the scene when the once-revolutionary brother, in search of a prostitute, finds his sister as one, which leads to her suicide, is melodramatic but enormously direct in its strength. This is not a scene that Ray would have contemplated, but it works as well as that of the drunken refugees, disillusioned and arguing, in a wayside restaurant. Ghatak consistently went for broke, and his failures were often as exciting as others' successes.

Ghatak's penultimate film was a project close to his heart, but, given his nature and the state of his health, one which perhaps he should not have embarked upon at all. *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* (*A River Named Titus*) was originally an epic novel on the tragic lives of a fishing community in the valley of the River Titus, Bangladesh. Ghatak was invited to make it by a young producer, with possibly more money than business sense, who was determined to persuade the director to make a film in his home country for the first time. Accordingly, Ghatak was offered substantial facilities, including the use of a brand new Arriflex camera, donated by the Chief of the Films Department in Bangladesh. And he was received as a returning hero when he arrived in Dacca. This, the new government of Bangladesh felt, was a chance to start a coherent film industry in that country. But the shooting did not go well. For one thing, Ghatak's improvisatory technique frequently left an inexperienced crew in the dark as to his intentions. For another, Ghatak himself had more and more doubts. The country had changed since he had left in 1947, and so had he. He scarcely recognised it as his homeland.



He was also no longer fit enough. During the scoring of Ustad Bahadur Hussain Khan's music, he collapsed and was admitted to hospital, where tuberculosis was diagnosed as an ancillary difficulty to alcoholism. He was taken by helicopter from Dacca to Calcutta for special treatment. When the film was first shown, it was said to have looked unfinished and hastily cut. Not surprisingly it was another commercial failure, and though Ghatak later trimmed it by some 2,000 feet, he was unable to get permission to reshoot certain sections since the producer had finally given up hope and closed his bank account.

'It was an act of suicide,' Ghatak said. 'Only a lunatic or an ass would have tried to make a film like that and I was both.'

But the failure of *A River Named Titus* had more repercussions than that. It effectively prevented Bangladesh filmmaking from developing along economically feasible and culturally worthwhile lines. Yet, looking at the film now, it is by no means unremarkable, though obviously flawed and unsatisfactory. Painted on the widest canvas he had attempted, the ebb and flow of the river—the floods and the droughts—is reflected in its rhythm, and Ghatak undoubtedly proved that there was no lack of acting talent in Bangladesh. What the film lacks is stylistic consistency to go with its vision. It is romantic, melodramatic and angry in turn but tends to veer between pessimism and a kind of uplifting optimism that is not really reflected in the story. But its last sequences, where the dying heroine, searching for water, sees visions of a child playing the flute in a field swaying with corn, are very fine.

Jukti, Takko aar Gappo (*Reason, Debate and a Tale*) was officially dated a year later than *A River Named Titus* but in fact started before that project. It was specifically the story of a group of young men involved in an ever more futile armed struggle against the state, and there is little doubt that it was a comment on the Naxalite cause by which Ghatak had been both attracted and repelled. Essentially, however, it was his own autobiography, with the drunken intellectual—who in the end confronts the Naxalites—played by himself. 'This will be my most serious and my most complex film,' Ghatak had said beforehand and there is little doubt that it makes a fascinating epitaph. His own performance is certainly a revelation.

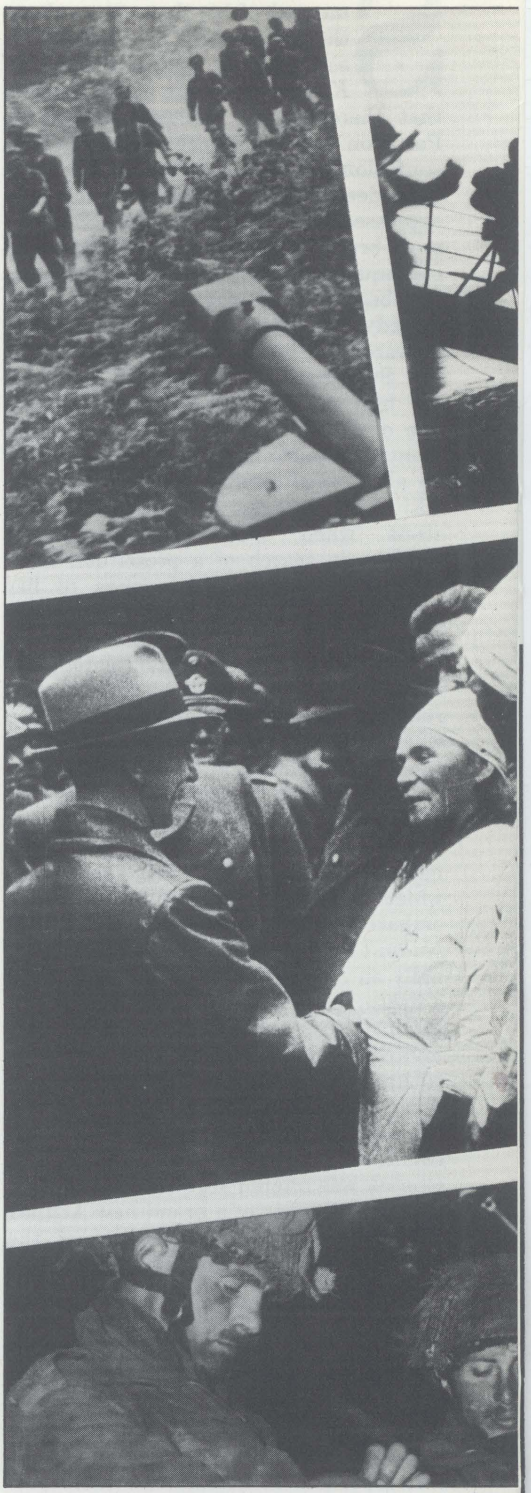
Kumar Shahani has written that Ghatak was chronically short of funds and vomiting blood when he made the film, yet his portrayal of the drunken man was 'unparalleled'. 'I remember him on the days when he stalked down the Institute corridors and we addressed him as the Tiger from Blake's poem which he loved to quote. In *Jukti, Takko aar Gappo*, he seemed to remember it too—only with a change of meaning: "I am burning, everyone is burning, the universe is burning." ' Shahani notes the scenes of confrontation with his wife, the young woman from Bangladesh and the Naxalites, and the individual shot where he sits against the light falling from his window, the face emerging from the washed-out area almost as that of a ghost. 'In Indian cinema,' he writes, 'the only other performance of such great simplicity and directness that I know is that of the saint-poet Tukaram (in the film of the same name) played by Pagnis.

'The saint was also considered a deviant in his own time. Is it a commentary on our society—perhaps in the vein of Ritwik himself—that modern saints should be so driven to alcoholism and suchlike that they are emasculated before they can make a lasting impact? Tukaram has lived through his songs and the legends about him amongst the people of Maharashtra. He made a permanent dent in the rigid caste structure. In his own way, Ritwik must have hoped to make a change. In all the fifteen years that I knew him every crisis brought to him a sense of euphoria. The communist uprising of his youth had taught him renewed vigour and hope. But like most other poets he had not the ability to organise. He chose instead to sing.'

Ghatak died two years after the completion of his last film. At 51 he had lived enough for two men, but frequently self-destructively. His body was taken to the crematorium in an open public vehicle so that his many friends could see him. It was, a witness has commented, like a scene from one of his own films. Perhaps the way *Jukti, Takko aar Gappo* should have ended. He had certainly summed up his own tragedy in the film within the lines: 'For a bottle I will lie and steal but for name or fame or position I will never lie.' To which a young man replies: 'You have practised that pose long enough to become an adept.' Yet his justification remains in the small group of films which can be accounted among the most lively, committed and passionate to be made in postwar India. 'I have no right,' he once said, 'to indulge in art unless I am able to bring into sharp focus at least one facet of the acute crisis facing our country. Most of my films are humble efforts to come to grips with that.' ■

TELEVISION HISTORY THE NEXT STEP

JERRY KUEHL



Panoramic television history:

EVER SINCE 1964, when BBC-2 showed *The Great War*, its 26-part series about the First World War, television histories, in the form of multi-part, large budget documentary productions about past events, have seldom been absent from British television screens. The elements of which they are composed are familiar to us all: film from the archives or specially shot; interviews with eyewitnesses and experts; commentary written by people with specialised knowledge; texts spoken by a visible presenter or by a voice-over; music, either of the period or specially composed; graphics and stills. These elements can be combined in seemingly endless ways. Richard Broad's *Palestine* used experts and eyewitnesses. He wrote the commentary himself in consultation with his production team and historical advisers; he used no original music, and the text was spoken by a regular Thames presenter. The scripts for *The Great War* were written by several hands, all of them military historians. The series used original or specially arranged music and was narrated by a freelance actor. And so on.

As the form has developed, its conventions—if not its constituent parts—have evolved substantially. *The Great War* cheerfully deployed feature film, training film and actuality material without differentiating between them; printed footage back to front to ensure that the Allies were always seen attacking in the same direction on the screen, and delivered a single, consistent narrative line. *The World at War*, ten years later, as a matter of policy used no feature film without identifying it as such, assumed that audiences could identify their own side's troops even if they moved in different directions in different battles, and accepted substantial contradictions between views expressed in different episodes. *The Troubles*, seven years after that, incorporated contradictions into the body of individual programmes. Not only did eyewitnesses contradict each other (that began to happen as soon as adversaries were allowed to give their own versions of events in their own words). Experts were allowed to contradict each other as well. These programmes did not conclude with instructions to the viewer about what to think: they left the viewer with competing accounts of events, and made no effort to resolve the resulting lack of certainty.

Clearly, much ground has been won in the last twenty years from those who feel that the serious presentation of the past has no place on television, unless in the form of personalised lectures, presentations by mandarin scholars, or the distillation of the received wisdom of the university. It is possible to spell out in more detail just how much has been gained. When television histories began, conventional wisdom required them to be both authoritative and comprehensive. Behind any major project was the belief that every generously funded series would be British television's final word. Once the BBC or ITV dealt with it in 13 or 26 parts, no one need ever again do a history of the First World War, or of America, or the British Empire. No one believes any more that such vast themes are exhausted by a single series, or that television history is uniquely authoritative.

The World at War's assertions that Hitler was at the same time a twentieth century biological imperialist and simply yielding to a centuries-old geopolitical imperative when he attacked the Soviet Union are, perhaps, compatible. In no way can the competing versions of the recent histories of Palestine and Ireland offered by participants in *Palestine* and *The Troubles* be reconciled; and neither series made any attempt to reconcile them. Thus, television histories are now

images from 'The World at War', on which Jerry Kuehl was associate producer.

seen as contributions to historical debates and not as summings up. That is as it should be. No responsible historian would ever suggest that any work of printed history could be the last word on a subject, nor would anyone suggest that it would be an impertinence for Ronald Fraser to write a book on the Spanish Civil War since Hugh Thomas had published one already. Yet until recently, such attitudes prevailed in television. ITV never thought it might make a history of World War One once the BBC had transmitted theirs; while the BBC abandoned its long-contemplated history of World War Two once it became clear that Thames was committed to *The World at War*. So Thames' decision to produce its history of Ireland, even though the BBC was known to be making its own version, marked a turning point—one which has been confirmed by ATV's (now Central's) decision not to be deterred from producing its history of the Spanish Civil War, even though Granada will have transmitted its version long before this is completed. This evolution may have begun with a reluctant admission that no single series can Do It All; programme-makers and executives alike now appear to welcome the fact that there will always be new things to say and show, different points of view and different styles in which to present material.

Though it is now accepted that witnesses and experts may contradict each other, and that commentators may never have the last word, there is one area in which the old habits remain. Television historians still assume that the visual records they use are transparent windows through which they can look into the past. Like the glass bottoms of boats, they reveal to the onlooker extraordinary goings on in the ocean below; but they are not a part of the action they allow the spectator to view. It is accepted that the boat must be chosen with care. The good ship 'Feature Film' shows one sort of action; the SS 'Newsreel' and its sister ship 'Television News' provide a different set of insights; while HMS 'Home Movie' reveals a heady mixture of the utterly banal and the strikingly libellous. But once the film is chosen, using it properly is thought to be a matter of following simple guidelines. The most important is not to misrepresent visual material: not to try knowingly to pass off scenes from feature films, or after-the-fact reconstructions, as actuality footage. So far as actuality material is concerned, the most important rule is not to pretend that material shot at a particular time and place was shot at a different time and in another place.

These guidelines, simple enough in principle, are costly and difficult to apply in practice. An executive producer, committed to a series on great naval engagements of the twentieth century, will not be happy to be told that there is no film of the Battle of Jutland or of the pursuit of the *Graf Spee*, or German film of the last voyage of the *Bismarck*; no film of the crippling of the *Tirpitz*; virtually no Japanese film of their attack on Pearl Harbour and none at all of their part in the Battle of Midway; nor is there any British film of the torpedo attack which crippled the Italian fleet at Taranto. Similarly, a producer committed to a series on great land battles may not be pleased to learn that in the First World War no allied cameramen were allowed in the front lines until the war was almost half over; that virtually no footage from the Russian Civil War survives; that much if not most of the Soviet record of the battle for Stalingrad was filmed after the event; and that probably the only German film of the Battle of Berlin in April 1945 is an amateur's four second Agfacolor clip of the General Staff Headquarters burning at night.

Similar problems arise off the battlefields. Television histories of the Final Solution must cope with the fact that no German film of extermination camps has ever been found. Chroniclers of the Nixon Presidency know that Robert

'What will become of the panoramic visual histories . . . The answer is that they will

Haldeman shot thousands of feet of White House home movies, but none of the Watergate conspiracy. And there are more than fifty hours of videotape chronicling the foundation of the Social Democratic Party, but none of Shirley Williams deciding to join it.

There is nothing mysterious about any of these gaps in the filmed record of our century. The Battle of Jutland was fought in conditions of such poor visibility that no film could be exposed. Neither the *Graf Spee* nor its pursuers had professional cameramen on board. The *Bismarck* did, but the film went down with the ship. The *Tirpitz* was damaged by a delayed action explosive device. The crew of the British submarine which planted it did not stay to film the explosion, and the Germans didn't expect one to take place. The aircraft which attacked Pearl Harbour had no room for passengers. The British sank the Italian fleet in Taranto in darkness, and the Americans sank the Japanese vessel carrying all the film with the Japanese point of view of the Battle of Midway before it left the scene of the battle.

So too with land engagements. British authorities, though happy to stage mock battles, did not appreciate the value of allowing cameramen to film real ones until the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The Soviet commander of the most fiercely contested sectors in Stalingrad decided that journalists and cameramen would get in the way, and so kept them out until the fighting died down. By the time the Red Army reached Berlin, the German newsreel organisations had ceased to function and their cameramen had nothing to film with. On the other hand, the Russians had ample film in 1945, but not in 1919—and without raw stock no one can film anything.

The Germans didn't want to film their extermination camps, nor did they want them to be filmed. Their victims had no opportunity. Robert Haldeman had other things on his mind during the Watergate period than recording on film the conspiracy of which he was a part. And since Shirley Williams' decision to join the SDP was, like all decisions, a mental, not a physical event, it could never show up on any image, no matter how many cameras might be present.

Professional programme-makers are well aware of these problems, and of the range of strategies which are available to help overcome them. The first is simply to deny that a problem exists, and to treat all film as equally authentic: to construct the attack on Pearl Harbour from models, training film and a few clips from *Tora! Tora! Tora!*; to evoke Auschwitz with scenes from a transit camp in Holland, or to show the inferno of the blitz on Coventry with RAF film of the destruction of Nuremberg five years later. No particular importance need be attached to reproducing accurately the surface appearances of events, since expressing their inner reality is what really matters. This view refuses to acknowledge that the wilful inclusion of spurious material contaminates the whole of the production in which it appears. An audience recognising unacknowledged material from a 1970s soap opera in an account of death camps in 1943 will not treat this as an irrelevancy. It will treat all other material presented to it with suspicion, and for this reason alone the practice of concealing the origins of material is no longer acceptable to responsible programme-makers.

A second strategy open to programme-makers to cover visual gaps is to adapt their commentaries to the visual material they do possess. Lacking film of the cabinet debating, or of President Hindenburg approving, the March 1933 Emergency Decree, it is possible to use film of Hitler addressing a Nazi party rally, accompanied by a commentary which says, 'One month after coming to power, Hitler introduced the Decree for the Protection of the People and State which empowered the police to arrest all political opponents and keep them in protective custody for an indefinite period.' Since the commentary does not explicitly show Hitler promulgating the Decree, the producer can claim that no one has been deceived. But viewers aware of the difference between a cabinet meeting and a party rally will find this argument disingenuous.

Responsible visual historians use commentary not to mislead viewers about what they are seeing on the screen, but to try to ensure that they are not misled. Granted, it is hard to write 'Armoured vehicles like these fought on terrain like this in the summer of 1942' when the narrative cries out for drama: 'June 16. 3.30 pm. Von Paulus' lead columns broke through the Soviet defences at Obansk: the race for Stalingrad was on.' But only rarely can combat film sustain commentary with this degree of precision. Filmmakers acknowledge this when they talk about tactics or policies rather than about particular events, over film which they cannot positively identify. Of course in doing so they worry about the implications of the restraint they exercise, which appears to narrow so substantially both the range of topics which they may legitimately treat and the manner in which they may treat them. If visual history is to be limited to subjects of which authentic film is known to exist, and if commentary is to be shackled so closely to those images, what will become of the broad panoramic visual histories which have been the glory of British television?

The answer is that they will disappear, and high time too. Or rather the answer is that they will continue to be made by programme-makers who are unable or unwilling to adapt themselves to a more demanding discipline, and they will be financed and transmitted by executives unwilling to abandon the formulas which have proved so successful in the past. But conscientious programme-makers will be less and less interested in making such series, or in making them in traditional ways.

The value of Granada's forthcoming history of the Spanish Civil War and Central TV's history of Vietnam will be enhanced by whatever as yet unseen films, especially from the Republican and North Vietnamese side, their researchers will find and bring to light. Granada's writers can find a form of words enabling them to use the dramatic daylight scenes of Republican troops crossing the Ebro river in July 1938, while making it clear that the assault itself took place at night. Central will be able to use North Vietnamese film of Hanoi's air defences without endorsing the claim that the guns seen firing are actually bringing down American B-52s. But it seems clear that the next step in television history will not lie in seeking out more exotic sources of film, nor in devising more and more ingenious rhetorical devices to accommodate what film exists—important though these activities will continue to be. What visual history must now try to do is incorporate into itself concerns about its own sources and methods. Thus an account of the Battle of Stalingrad should no longer resort to virtuoso editing to gloss over the virtual absence of Soviet film until the battle turned in the Russians' favour, and of German film once it did. A history of the Waffen SS need not conceal the fact that until it marched into captivity in 1945, virtually the only films made about it were sponsored by it, or made with its co-operation. Such a history, if it included an interview with Sir George Kennard denying that the SS committed war crimes, could also explain whether he had been selected because the producer thought his views were representative of the British army as a whole, or because he was the only British officer to hold them.

A history of the Cold War would no longer require its dubbing editor to perform prodigies in matching Winston Churchill's lip movements and voice, but could talk about why his use of the phrase 'iron curtain' at Fulton, Missouri was interesting to the radio reporters who recorded it, but not to newsreel cameramen, who neglected to film it. A history of Vietnam could point out that if television audiences saw the war as a series of helicopter rides and fire fights, that was not because it was only fought

which have been the glory of British television? . . . disappear—and high time too.'

that way, but because television network executives wanted action footage, and it was easier and cheaper for cameramen to film this by flying into battle areas with medical evacuation teams than by slogging through the jungles for weeks with foot soldiers.

There is nothing new about the idea that the sources of a work of history should be examined and evaluated in the work itself. It is what historians accept they must do whenever they set out to write history. And though this has not been common in visual history, it is not entirely unknown for documentary films and television programmes to turn their eyes upon themselves in this way. *The World at War* found a way to use a Soviet reconstruction of the link-up between the two armies which surrounded the Germans at Stalingrad, explain the reasons for it, yet not diminish its dramatic impact as an episode in the narrative of the battle. *Palestine* juxtaposed American and British versions of the same newsreel story of an internment camp in Cyprus: viewers could judge for themselves the gulf between American and British journalistic appreciations of British policy towards illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine without feeling they had been dragooned into a BFI seminar. And series like Granada's on the Spanish Civil War and Central's on Vietnam will have an opportunity to place their own visual elements in context without sacrificing the dramatic values which have made television histories so popular.

There is, for instance, a newsreel story of the Fall of Madrid shown in British cinemas in November 1936, even as it became clear that the city had not fallen. What will happen to that newsreel story? It could be left out altogether, but that would be an easy option. That newsreel is part of the history of Madrid. Who put the story together? Why did they do it? What is really going on in the images shown on the screen? Who saw the story and what did they make of it? For anyone wishing to understand British attitudes towards Spain and its Civil War such questions are worth trying to answer, and a television history with access to that film is uniquely placed to try to answer them.

The history of Vietnam will provide opportunities of a similar sort. So far as the war there is concerned, memories of those who watched it from afar on their television screens are dominated by two images: the summary execution in a Saigon street of a Viet Cong by the South Vietnamese Brigadier-General Loan; and the terrified face of a small girl, injured by napalm, fleeing from a village inadvertently attacked by the South Vietnamese airforce. These episodes, widely seen at the time they occurred, and reproduced countless times since, have appeared to give powerful support to the belief that America's will to fight was fatally compromised by the appearance, night after night, of horrifying moving images, in colour and sound, in the living rooms of the nation. Research by American social scientists has largely discredited the view that television coverage of the war affected American public opinion one way or another, but that is not the whole story. Both episodes were indeed shown on television (though audiences never actually saw General Loan pull the trigger because a South Vietnamese soldier walked in front of the camera at that instant), but what stuck in viewers' minds were not television images but the still photographs of frame enlargements subsequently reproduced in newspapers and magazines. So much for the power of the moving image. Where a written history of the war might mention these episodes, a television history should do more. It must reflect on television's presentation of the events and discuss their perception and their consequences, otherwise it will omit an important dimension of the story it has committed itself to tell.

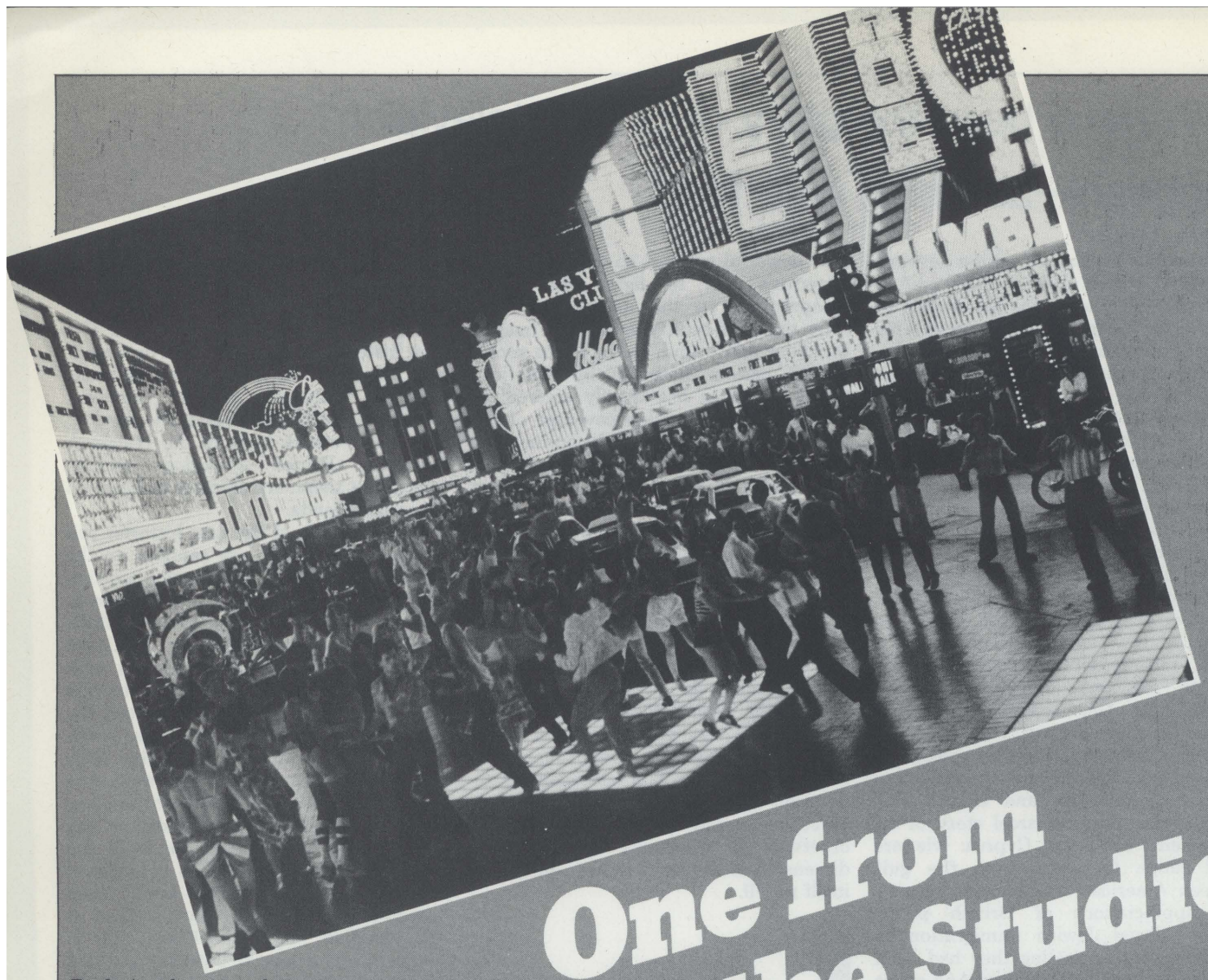
If television history is to be done in this new way, what will it be like to watch? Programmes will *look* much as they have done in the past. Archive film, talking heads, stills and graphics will be edited with skill and pace and style. Viewers will not be subjected to interminable analyses of shots and sequences, nor be bombarded with organisational flow charts of pre-war newsreel companies or American network news services of the 1960s. The place for such aids to understanding is in the non-broadcast versions of series. It is easy to envisage a videodisc or cassette comprised of a programme as transmitted plus back-up material. Such material would include not only explanatory graphics, bibliographies, shot lists and full texts of printed speeches of which only excerpts have been used, but outtakes from interviews recorded for the programme, alternative versions of newsreel material, and even edited sequences omitted from the final cut of the programme. No one would be obliged to make use of such material, any more than readers are forced to read footnotes. But footnotes are often as illuminating as the texts they support, and competent programme-makers will welcome the chance to share such material with those interested in it.

The new history will avoid subjects, or treatments of subjects, which it cannot cope with honestly. If it deals with the Battle of Jutland it will be either through the memories of survivors, or as an exercise in how others—including other film-makers—have described it. Its climax would not be shots of the home fleet firing their big guns on manoeuvres. The new history will do what it can do well; it will not try to do what cannot be done. Shirley Williams' private thoughts, Hitler committing suicide in the Bunker, the horror-struck crew of the *Bismarck* watching British torpedoes coming straight at them, are unlikely to figure on its visual agenda.

What viewers of the new histories will sense above all is a new candour on the part of participants, new kinds of participants, and a new frankness and modesty on the part of the commentary which carries the programmes along. Dr David Owen's account of his discussions with the Social Democratic Party's steering committee about who should contest the Warrington by-election will be worth listening to; as will the film-maker Nick Hart-Williams' account of Dr Owen's role in persuading the committee not to allow these discussions to be included in the many hours of videotape made of the history of the party. And the producer of a film using those tapes would have something to say about why a student at the National Film School was able to secure access denied to both ITV and BBC programme-makers. Accounts by soldiers of what went wrong on D-Day are worth hearing. But viewers see the Normandy beaches through cameramen's eyes, and Sergeant Ernest Walter's account of what he wasn't able to film, even when things were going right, is at least as valuable. Voices like his have scarcely been heard at all. Dons, journalists, and natural extroverts aren't the only people with something to say.

So far as the commentaries are concerned, it is easy to speak of frankness and modesty, but harder to see what that would mean in practice. Part of what it means has been spelled out already: questions about the provenance of film, or its significance, will become integral to programmes in which it appears. There is more: commentary writers will not be expected to express certainties they do not feel, since an honest 'I don't know' carries more weight than a false 'This is how it was.' No one need write 'The Soviet people fought as one man against the Hitlerite invaders' as they contemplate the half million Russian troops of the Vlasov army in their German uniforms; no one need describe the foundation of the SDP as the greatest upheaval in British politics in this century at least until 1999, and no one need ever say 'There's nothing more to say.'

All these measures have a single purpose: to treat the visual history of our century with the respect it deserves. It will not be easy and it will not be cheap. But until television accepts the challenge, it will never come of age. ■



One from the Studio

Carlos Clarens

Back in the 40s, there was no more endearing term for a good film than *sleeper*, the sort of unassuming, unheralded picture that seemed to have crept up on reviewers; the word carried the implication that artists and technicians had laboured quietly and devotedly to spring a surprise on somewhat jaded sensibilities. Nowadays, films are more often inflated into events than allowed to be discovered, yet there is something to be learned whenever a relatively small-budget film, whose existence is known only to a few insiders until weeks before its release, garners a set of unanimously good notices. Such is the case with Barry Levinson's first film, *Diner*, a work bearing a truly original psychological stamp. Whether it will succeed at the box-office is another matter; after all, *Cutter's Way* and *The Great Santini* failed to cash in on their good notices. But even at this early date it's more than likely that *Diner*, the sleeper, will outgross *One from the Heart*, the event of the winter season.

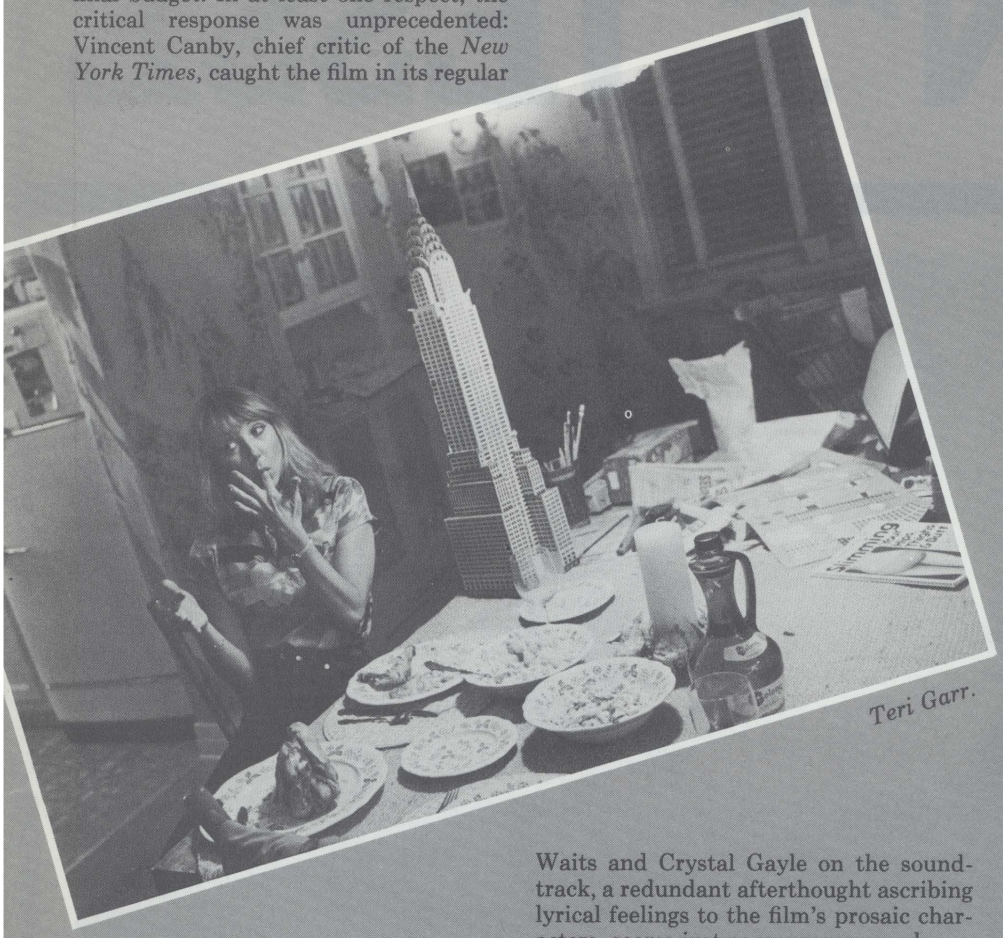
Or, as it turned out, the non-event. It may have happened that overexposure finally took its toll, and that critics and audience alike reacted adversely to the barrage of facts and figures that accompanied the production of Francis Coppola's latest picture; or tired of following the artistic and financial vicissitudes, the perils and last-minute rescues, that gained Coppola an inordinate time and space in the media. Since *Apocalypse Now*, another risky proposition but one that ultimately paid off, the director seemed to capitalise on his personal brand of brinkmanship. There were expansive pronouncements to the effect that the newly acquired Zoetrope Studios would restore, on a smaller scale and under Coppola's benign supervision, the old Hollywood studio system. Michael Powell and Gene Kelly were enlisted as godfathers-in-residence to such fledgling directors as Caleb Deschanel and Bob Dalva, respectively cinematographer and editor of the successful *The Black Stallion*, and now assigned to *The Escape Artist* and *The Black Stallion Returns*; while Wim Wenders, hardly a debutant, would be entrusted with *Hammett*. Coppola, after pondering a modern version of Goethe's *Kindred by Choice*, to be shot in Japan, settled for *One from the Heart*, an original story by Armyan Bernstein, as his personal project. Jean-Luc Godard would be in attendance during the shooting.

With the exception of *One from the Heart*, all these films remain to be either completed or released: as of this writing *Hammett* will be premiered at Cannes, after almost four years on Zoetrope's agenda. Some of Coppola's side ventures were quite successful, however. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler* was premiered in 1980 at Manhattan's Lincoln Center under the aegis of Zoetrope; and a year later Abel Gance's venerable *Napoleon* was shown at Radio City Music Hall. Coppola's media image changed from that of a struggling film-maker to that of a hyped-up impresario functioning close to the edge.

One from the Heart was also premiered at the Music Hall, a sudden decision of Coppola's that took Paramount, the distributor, by surprise. The film proved disappointing, after (or because of) Coppola's often conflicting position papers. For one thing, his 'new kind of old-fashioned romance' failed to substantiate Coppola's claims for a new electronic era in film entertainment—a claim that incidentally failed to take notice of much valuable work in the video field everywhere. For another, *One from the Heart* ran under ninety minutes when *Hitler* (at seven hours) and *Napoleon* (at four) had proved that an imposing running time was *de rigueur* in such events. Critical response was cool to lukewarm, and Paramount (who at one point had come to Coppola's rescue) withdrew from the distribution deal. A few days later, Columbia took over the film and gave it a decent launching, but the damage was already done.

One from the Heart succeeded

Heaven's Gate as the current example of authorial extravagance. It became the sort of failure that takes a studio down with it. Zoetrope Studios was put on the block, minimum bid being twenty million dollars, two million less than the picture's final budget. In at least one respect, the critical response was unprecedented: Vincent Canby, chief critic of the *New York Times*, caught the film in its regular run and rebutted what he considered too lenient a review by the *Times*' second-stringer, Janet Maslin. Had Canby had a chance to approach *One from the Heart* on a one-to-one basis, as a film and not a media circus, it's more than likely that he would have been more generous. Call it an event that backfired, and we will probably have to wait for Godard to determine what possessed Coppola to make *One from the Heart* the way he did.



Teri Garr.

The credits sequence is a bit of tabletop bravura, with the camera soaring over some sand dunes that suggest recumbent female forms until it reaches miniature models of the most famous Las Vegas gambling casinos, the major credits wittily incorporated into the toy façades. A sudden 360 degree pan and a dissolve introduce Dean Tavoularis' dustless, neon-lit suggestion of downtown Vegas, one of several extravagant sets to become sightseeing attractions during the brief heyday of Zoetrope.

Not as starkly stylised as that of *Red Garters* or *Guys and Dolls*, nor as evocative as that of Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York*, Tavoularis' production design is in the artificial, studio-bound tradition of musical comedy: it must have been Coppola's intention to exert complete control over his film, yet one never stops anticipating a production number that will justify the sets. Disappointingly, it never happens, although production stills do show Gene Kelly marshalling a legion of pedestrians into some sort of choreography. The caterwauling of Tom Waits and Crystal Gayle on the soundtrack, a redundant afterthought ascribing lyrical feelings to the film's prosaic characters, seems just as unprogrammed.

The setting suggests a transient, shimmering mirage rather than the garish, corrupt gambling capital of the West, and is the film's one poetic conceit. (If only *Finian's Rainbow* could have benefited from such stylisation!) But the characters who inhabit this acrylic-and-plastic fantasy seldom trip themselves the light fantastic, even though their motivations—anomie, frustration, sexual restlessness, a certain cynicism—are stacked like so many cue cards to lead them into song-and-dance routines of the post-Sondheim school of musical comedy. After years of unmarried but reasonably content life together, Frannie (Teri Garr) and Hank (Frederic Forrest) are chomping at the bit of faithfulness. Both get a chance to stray during a July 4th weekend. Frannie meets a singing waiter (Raul Julia), slightly sleazy but still sexy enough to lure her into his motel bed; and Hank allows himself to be picked up by an exotic girl acrobat (Nastassia Kinski) whom he makes love to in the front seat of a car, in the junkyard where he works. Having had their flings, Frannie and Hank leave their one-night stands to return to each other.

Not quite Lubitsch, not even Blake Edwards; more like an R-rated segment of *The Love Boat*. Once a crack scenarist himself, Coppola is offering this time little that is riveting in the way of story or characterisation. Nothing in fact must distract the viewer from the technical accomplishments, as if the project were conceived as a spendthrift demo of what the various technical departments at Zoetrope could accomplish. In the old days of the film industry, MGM and Warner Brothers would periodically devise similar test reels to show off the company's assets, most valuable of which were the contract players. Instead, Coppola flaunts his studio's technology: his actors, talented and attractive as they may be, are playing in support of a new breed of post-auteur superstar, the artist as technocrat.

If Nastassia Kinski and Raul Julia acquit themselves better than Teri Garr and Frederic Forrest, it's partly because they have a chance to play fanciful, illusory sexual phantasms—they don't seem so out of place in the setting and they get to dance a step or two. Kinski's face is made the subject of a daydream montage, the equivalent of those endearing animated sequences of old, and the one moment in the film that suggests an aesthetic contribution from the field of video.

Technique does not necessarily mean form, and *One from the Heart*'s ambitions are mainly visible in the packaging. If Coppola had wished to pursue his bittersweet libretto into the realm of high comedy of manners (which he most obviously did not), we would be left with the rueful wisdom of, say, Max Ophuls' *Madame De*, not as far-fetched a comparison as it may seem, especially when one realises that in both pictures interlopers tend to be used and discarded rather than the other way around.

It's obvious throughout that Coppola aimed at the perfect seamlessness of late Ophuls and middle Hitchcock. But whereas *Le Plaisir* and *Rope* carried enough fictional momentum to take the viewer's mind off the wild walls that had to make way for the camera and the endless takes, Coppola turns *One from the Heart* into a game in which the viewer is constantly alerted to the director's ingenuity. In two long continuous shots, we follow characters into buildings, up staircases, in and out of rooms: we know about Vittorio Storaro's Steadicam and we sense there is a crane somewhere, and the performance is no less remarkable for being obvious.

At other moments, a scrim curtain introduces a theatrical element: even the unsophisticated viewer is made aware of the logistics that often require stand-ins to appear in the same take with the stars. One thinks of Murnau's *Sunrise* (which also carried a subtitle: 'A Song of Two Humans') and realises that this obsession with control is hardly new in the cinema, but rather a form of demented artistry that runs through its history. Murnau's problem was not to let it show, Coppola's that it won't show enough. There is an absurd climax in which an all too obvious dummy of an airliner flies on wires over an airport built in *trompe l'oeil*. The eye is not deceived, however: merely enchanted. ■

'DON'T JESSE

Keith Carradine (left) in 'Southern Comfort'.

JAMES ME!'

Michael Sragow on Walter Hill

It was an image out of Vietnam—a soldier splashing through freezing, waist-high water, searching for footholds in the swamp while his eyes sought out the terror in the bush. His contorted features and helter-skelter profile coalesced with the mist and mud. When he reached dry land, he collapsed next to a table set with coffee and doughnuts. Walter Hill was directing his fifth movie, *Southern Comfort*, in the dead of winter 1981, deep in Northern Texas-Louisiana border country. The soldier on the ground was his actor. 'This is the roughest thing I've ever done,' the actor groaned. Hill, standing nearby with a cigar in hand, flicked his ash, then looked at the actor and beyond. 'Why do I give so much and ask so little?' The next man ran the same course doggedly, his eyes fixed dead ahead. Hill motioned for a retake. 'Next time, why don't you pick some *high* water?' the soldier got out between gasps. Hill acknowledged, 'It's a tough route.'

'What I like to do is put interesting characters in tough situations and force them to make choices about conduct,' Hill says. The statement recalls Hemingway, one of his favourite writers: 'I admire Hemingway's early stuff enormously. When I was a kid I read *The Fifth Column* and *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. They were punctuated by little word pictures, incidents done in paragraphs, reportorial things about Greece and Africa and the First World War. Hemingway had a sound dramatic theory that also wasn't a bad idea of how to conduct a life. I know he became a kind of whipping boy, but listen, the mice around the cathedral are always complaining.'

After *Hard Times* (1975), *The Driver* (1978), *The Warriors* (1979), *The Long Riders* (1980) and *Southern Comfort* (1981), Hill is in the same position in the American cinema that Hemingway occupied in American literature before *The Sun Also Rises*. He is a controversial director but also a director's director (just as Hemingway was a writer's writer), better known to other filmmakers and to critics than to a general audience. His best fictions, like many of Hemingway's, are action stories, transformed by acute observation and craft into stirring moral fables. He reworks such 'dated' themes as courage and honour, and living up to one's code during times of crisis. He may be out of synch in an era when most prestigious film dramas are what Hill would call 'rug movies—you know, the kind where everyone stands around talking, on a rug.'

Hill's emphasis on integrity helps him find his way through morally complicated subcultures, whether that of the Jesse James gang in *The Long Riders* or of contemporary street gangs in *The Warriors*. 'My films are both real and unreal,' he says. 'You've got to create a context in which stark moral decisions make sense.' In the first film Hill directed, *Hard Times* (*The Streetfighter*, UK), that context is Depression New Orleans, where his drifter hero, Chaney (Charles Bronson), takes up the dangerous high-stakes sport of bare-knuckled streetfighting. When Chaney's woman asks what he does for a living, he says, 'I knock people down.' But Chaney is generous as well as brutal and transcends his circumstances. Like many of Hill's heroes, he is a man with a strong sense of self *and* enough fellow-feeling to keep from being merely selfish.

One of the few major American directors of his generation (he is 42) who never went to film school, Hill studied history and literature, took a Master's in English and toyed with the idea of journalism. His first movie job was writing the sort of 'educational' films that used to be shown in high school history and civics classes, what he calls 'docu-dramas before their time'. But Hill soon realised that if he wanted to accomplish anything substantial in the movies he had better become a director. He joined the Directors Guild of America assistant director training programme shortly after it started in 1964 and worked as a second AD for some two years. Though this prepared him for working on a movie set, it was not as effective a stepping stone to directing as writing saleable scripts. As soon as he'd sold an 'original', Hill became a full-time screenwriter.

John Milius, Terrence Malick, Walter Hill and Hill's long-time producing-writing partner David Giler were among a group of young writers employed by Warner Bros in the late 60s and early 70s. Hill is not particularly proud of his Warners films, which included *Hickey and Boggs* and *The Thief Who Came to Dinner*. In 1971, however, he wrote *The Getaway* for First Artists and National General Pictures. Directed by Sam Peckinpah, this script was the first to come out as Hill wanted; it was a commercial milestone and to Hill's mind an artistic one too. Though many consider this gangster movie an artful Peckinpah potboiler, Hill believes it succeeded in dramatising how a corrupt couple's 'qualities of courage' allowed them to achieve salvation. Peckinpah imparted to Hill the lesson that 'action must be rooted ruthlessly in character.'

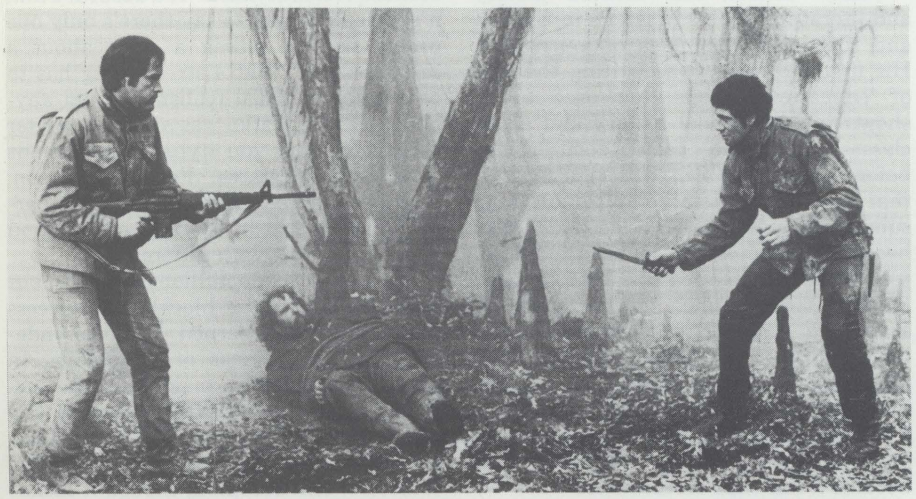
Over three years later, Hill got his chance to direct. Producer Lawrence Gordon, knowing that Hill had written an unproduced script concerning fist-fighting, called him in to rewrite and then direct *Hard Times*. This critical and financial success led Gordon to produce a Hill original, *The Driver*, perhaps the most abstract movie ever made in Hollywood. In the character of a professional getaway driver, 'the Cowboy' (Ryan O'Neal), Hill tried to work out a small-spirited variation of the Chaney figure—a man who cuts his life down to the bare essentials of work and shelter but who can't hang on to his integrity. Hill now sees this film as 'somewhat cold and negative', and 'interesting only in a minor-piece sort of way.' But he resents critics who lambasted the film simply because it was stylised. 'It's absurd! First, it's ridiculous just to say there's only one proper way of telling a story about a certain milieu, that a street thing has to be a piece of social realism. Would anybody say that Kafka was a terrible writer because he gave you stylised impressions of totalitarian states? For some reason, many people feel that movies are separate from the rest of Western culture and have to be dealt with differently.'

The Driver made millions overseas, but Hill didn't have the blockbuster success that could have earned him the independence of a Lucas or a Coppola. In 1978, when a deal to make Hill's favourite original script (a Western called *The Last Gun*) fell through, Lawrence Gordon offered him the chance to make *The Warriors*. Hill accepted, though it meant filming a difficult subject in almost impossible circumstances. Hill rewrote

the David Shaber script of Sol Yurick's novel, an update of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, replacing Greeks marching through Persia with a Coney Island street gang racing through enemy boroughs of Manhattan. In the meantime, Gordon and Paramount realised that at least four other teen gang movies were already in the works. Hill signed on to *The Warriors* late in the spring; he had to start shooting in June, and bring the film into the theatres on 9 February 1979, ahead of all the other gang movies. Hill not only beat the deadline, he put his stamp on the project from the start. 'To keep it from becoming ridiculous,' Hill says, 'this thing had to be done absolutely full-stop. We stripped these kids' lives down to their peer groups, then blew them all up again in comic book style. This was comic book, rock 'n' roll Xenophon. That was the way to get people to see these kids as warriors.'

Hill never expected the outcome. The media linked three or more teen killings to screenings of the film. 'We were suddenly the most talked about movie in the country,' Hill says. 'We thought we'd be the most obscure movie in the country.' Paramount Pictures tried to push the film back into obscurity, pulling TV and print ads. Hill took a savaging from many critics. The film was even called racist, though Hill had gone out of his way to make it non-racist: the Warriors themselves became a wildly improbable mix of blacks, whites and Hispanics. 'What people don't realise is that when you do something like *The Warriors*, even though the characters are two-dimensional they still have to have complete integrity in the two-dimensional sense. Each character has to be totally consistent, so anything odd he does will make a point. When a tough guy gives a girl a flower, it should kill you.'

Despite Paramount's jitters, *The Warriors*, with the help of Pauline Kael and a few other key critics, put Hill in the pulp avant-garde and proved to be his biggest financial success as a director to date. Even before working on *The Warriors*, though, Hill moved to consolidate his box-office standing and gain more autonomy in the industry by working on *Alien*, a frankly commercial project. When Hill read the original script by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett, he decided that it could be 'a science fiction version of *Jaws*'. His tough spare rewrite sold the film to Twentieth Century-Fox and director Ridley Scott. David Giler co-wrote the final draft and oversaw the production in England; Hill helped cast the film, and chipped in on post-production chores after finishing *The Warriors*. *Alien* was a sizable hit, ranking fourth on *Variety*'s list of 1979 box-office champions. But after Writers' Guild arbitrations Hill and Giler only got credit as production executives. Their hit instinct did not prove to be enough to put them in the catbird seat for big commercial movies.



From top: Charles Bronson in 'Hard Times'; Savanna Smith and James Keach in 'The Long Riders'; Guardsmen Powers Boothe and Fred Ward in 'Southern Comfort'.

Over the years, Hill has learned that 'There's a terrible impracticality about a director saying that a certain film is going to be his next one and devoting himself a hundred per cent to it. The financial surroundings are so goddamned tricky, there's always the chance they won't ask you back next year. Somebody coughs, somebody blinks, and you find yourself out of a job.' A score of projects Hill developed with Giler have gone unproduced (most regrettably a medieval epic, *The Sword*) and so have many projects Hill developed for other producers.

When it was announced in 1979, no project seemed better suited to Hill's talents than transferring James Crumley's cult detective novel *The Last Good Kiss* to the screen. Like many of Hill's movies, it was an original 'take' on an old genre. As Greil Marcus wrote, the novel was shaped 'by ambiguities of will and self-control, compassion, blown chances and rage', rather than the conventions of hard-boiled thrillers. The novel also contained several hairy plot twists. 'You could get away with them in a novel,' Hill says, 'but I had to *shoot* this shit.' He eliminated one character and tidied up the story. Then, at a Hollywood bar-and-grill, he ran into James Crumley himself, a big crusty man known to be

combative about his work. Crumley approached Hill, paused, then said, 'I only wish I'd read your script before I wrote my novel.' However, as studio executives searched for the biggest possible star to make Hill's script 'bankable', the writer-director bowed out. 'Walter isn't bitter about putting a project aside and taking it out of the drawer a year or two later,' says Mae Woods, who joined him as a personal assistant during post-production on *The Warriors*. 'He does feel that he can't keep the energy going on a project indefinitely. But if the opportunity to make *The Last Good Kiss* came up again, he'd probably try to make it. He's still hoping to make *The Last Gun*.'

It's understandable that Hill is wistful for Hollywood's early days: 'One thing a director could look forward to if he worked at a studio,' he says, 'was a career where you were going to go out year after year and make movies. Today, if your new movie's a bomb, you're liable to be on the shelf for two years. Now we're talking about careers in which ten or twelve movies will be a significant number. Certain careers are written off too early on. If John Ford hadn't kept making films after 1934—when he'd already been making movies for close to twenty years—he wouldn't be a remembered figure in the American cinema today. But these days people don't expect you to learn, they expect you to be good right away.'

What is heartening about Hill's own career is that he has managed to grow as an artist from one film to the next: he's even made strictly commissioned jobs his own through craft and force of personality. If *Hard Times* and *The Driver* were economical genre pieces with vivid action flourishes and *The Warriors* was full-blown baroque adventure, his next film, *The Long Riders*, proved to be a notably lyrical and robust historical movie.

It came as no surprise to those who know Hill that a movie about the James gang tapped roots in his personality. Hill peppers his conversation as well as his movies' dialogue with archaic slang, like 'Don't Jesse James me!' (for 'Don't try to stick me up!'). On set he occasionally calls for a 'cowboy close-up', which I'm told means from the six-shooters up. His home in the Hollywood Hills is lined with posters and mementoes of the Old West as well as modern art. Frank Marshall, who worked as an associate and an executive producer on *The Driver* and *The Warriors* (respectively) before producing *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, says that he and Hill hit it off immediately partly because they're native Californians: 'I grew up in Newport Beach and he grew up in Long Beach. We both grew up kind of normal—we liked sports and alcohol and chasing girls.'

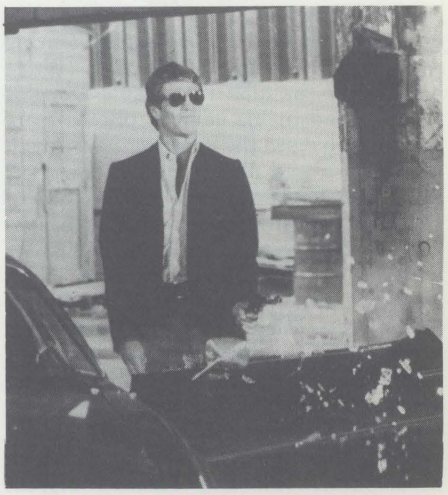
When Hill lived in Long Beach, it was little more than a semi-rural blue-collar town with a naval base. Hill says that his family's main response to his career is 'perplexity'. The one family anecdote I've heard him tell concerns an ancestor who was the only successful Republican politician in Tennessee at the time of Teddy Roosevelt. In response to the hanging of a country cousin for a mere 'manslaughter sort of thing', he ran for governor on an anti-capital punishment platform. With his defeat, he was so resoundingly humiliated that he moved the family to California.

Hill saw the James saga afresh in *The Long Riders* as 'a very Midwestern story about farm boys, hill people with clannish values, who were exposed to violence in the Civil War and afterwards created a new ethic in the mobility of their lifestyle.' In what he called a classic case of 'form following function', he cast the Carradine brothers as the Youngers, the Quaids as the Millers, the Guests as the Fords and the Keaches (who were the co-writers and executive producers) as the Jameses. He polished the script (without credit) and added such choice Americana as an inspired piece of clog-dancing. Surprisingly, he achieved some of his finest effects when the images were most still—courtship scenes became romantically charged tintypes. You could sense the characters' passions breaking through their proprieties. By the time he was through, Hill had made the best Western since *McCabe and Mrs Miller*.

'I love making Westerns,' he says. 'I wish I could just make one after the other. But producers aren't likely to finance them until one comes along that's really a performer at the box-office. *The Long Riders* did OK, but that isn't enough for people in this business any more. They all want to hit one out of the ballpark.' So Hill was soon back to hustling projects. When a new movie financing company called the Cinema Group approached Hill and Giler in search of product, the partners 'dipped into the trunk' and pulled out *Southern Comfort*. They had conceived the film five years before, after Hill made *Hard Times*. 'I'd shot a scene with Cajuns,' Hill recalls, 'and I became fascinated with Cajun culture. They're in touch with the process of things. And they're one of the few subcultures in America that are resisting assimilation pretty well. The Cajun phrase for outsiders is *les Americains*, which implicitly means that they don't consider themselves part of America.' The movie evolved into a survival thriller about a Louisiana National Guard unit lost in Cajun country. In part, Hill wanted to echo the Vietnam experience, to express the panic and terror of American soldiers on the run in an alien swampland culture.

To Hill, 'there's no question that the best part of this business is making the movies, and the worst part is making the deals.' Observing him in the bayou was a chance to watch Walter Hill at his best. Hill managed to persuade many colleagues from previous movies to join him in the desolate area around Caddo Lake (which stood in for the more inaccessible Atchatalaya Basin). The company was quartered in Bossier, Louisiana, but the locations were an hour away, in places like Uncertain, Texas. Temperatures plummeted to minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The highway marquees for nearby churches bore such cheering messages as 'a life without purpose is an early death'.

David Giler (who directed and co-wrote *The Black Bird*, and whose other writing credits include *The Parallax View* and *Fun with Dick and Jane*) co-wrote, produced and did some second unit direction on *Southern Comfort*. On the set, the tall, bespectacled Giler, who describes himself as 'a cheerful nihilist', is as gregarious as Hill is reserved. The partnership works. Giler sharpens the satiric edge of Hill's sardonicism, and both are what Giler calls



From top: the Warriors; the Driver; and the Streetfighter.

'anti-Freudians'. In Hill's view, 'psychoanalysis has become some kind of religious experience for people who think of themselves as more sensitive than the average. In my brief and incomplete readings on the subject I find no scientific basis for this crap. If you present it as interesting speculative fiction, that's one thing. But in screenwriting, I'm very apprehensive about characters delineating themselves with a lot of dialogue and "back" story. I'm consumed with the notion that a situation or a nuance is stronger than anything the characters will say by themselves.'

Though Hill refers to the rewriting he did on location as a 'smoothing out process', major changes did occur. For example, one main character was killed in the script only to be revived by Hill and Giler before they filmed his death. True to the team's philosophy, this was not done for psychological reasons. They simply liked the character more than they thought they would. Perhaps, like the couple in *The Getaway*, the character proves himself strong and courageous enough to survive—something Hill didn't realise until he saw an actor at work in the part.

Cinematographer Andrew Laszlo was Hill's closest collaborator on the set. In his mid-50s, this veteran has come to prominence only recently, with Hill's *Warriors* and with NBC's *Shogun*. Laszlo is proud of the eye-popping colour in *The Warriors*, but on *Southern Comfort* he and Hill strove for an almost monochromatic vision. 'We are experimenting a little in this film,' Laszlo said. 'We're going after the look that David Douglas Duncan had in his combat photos from Korea. You'd see the GIs slogging through underbrush and all you'd notice is their steel helmets and maybe just a glint of light in their eyes.' Hill and Laszlo accentuated the funereal look of the winter swamp. Production designer John Vallone's Cajun village set felt like winter to the bone. Moss hung from the cypress trees, turning silver in the overcast. Smoke from garbage-barrel fires merged with the mist rising off the water. Vallone's grey-brown, weatherbeaten shacks and cottages blended into the thick atmosphere. Hill and Laszlo's biggest visual setback was the sun; sometimes there was too much and they had to screen it out.

Hill does not like to move the camera much, but he and Laszlo are sticklers when it comes to composition. 'If I get impatient and want to keep shooting,' he says, 'Andy makes me stick to the programme.' Hill deemed one key shot 'a beauty' after a single take. 'Was it an absolute beauty?' asked Laszlo. It was, Hill decreed, and that was all.

Hill casts his films for people who look right: the Cajun extras on *Southern Comfort* had broad, swarthy, craggy, vital faces, not Family of Man, 'we have dignity' faces. The stars of *Southern Comfort*, Keith Carradine and Powers Boothe, offered a striking contrast. Carradine is blond, lithe, open-faced; Boothe is dark, square-cut and brooding. Hill didn't so much direct them the days I was there as study their faces for the right expressions. When Carradine added four words to a line—'What'd I tell ya?' to be exact—he gave Hill a moment's pause. 'I guess you're used to improvising with Bobby [Altman],' he joked. Carradine protested that even on *Nashville* the actors worked their additions into the script before shooting. He said he wasn't crazy about improvising. 'Me neither,' Hill said, but he let the words stand.

The relations on the set were as relaxed as the concentration level was high. When Hill signalled a shot that an assistant felt wouldn't match up—two characters had swerved 90 degrees—the first AD, Pat Kehoe, muttered cryptically, 'There goes Sergio Spaghetti again.' Hill goodnaturedly grumbled back, 'I don't believe in continuity, all you've got to match are the looks on the actors' faces.' Hill's editor, Freeman Davies, later told me that the director was right. While the rest of the company went into the swamps, Davies would stay at the Bossier Hilton assembling the footage. Hill considers Davies, an associate editor to David Holden on *The Warriors* and *The Long Riders*, one of the best action editors in the business. For Hill and Davies, editing is an active process. 'Walter likes to call it the final rewrite,' Davies says. 'In the fight I edited in *The Warriors*, the guy who gets thrown through the commode door near the end originally went through it at the beginning. Walter saved a funeral scene he meant for Jesse James in *The Long Riders* by working in another character's funeral. I think of all the different elements that go into filmmaking, Walter likes editing the best. He can make the most of materials that are right in front of him.'

While Hill was still enmeshed in his 'final rewrite' of *Southern Comfort*, we talked at his home, mostly about one of his heroes, John Ford. 'There are a lot of misconceptions about Ford's career, that he was the great celebrator of the pioneers, bringing civilisation to the Old West, and so on. But he was also quite interested in *outlaws*. They had a real iconographic place in his work. I think his sympathies were often divided between the figures of stability and law and society—and the outsiders.

'When I was ten or eleven I saw *Stagecoach* in a theatre where we all bought our tickets as if it were a first-run movie. That film was not in any sense a museum piece, though I remember thinking, goddamn, John Wayne looks young there. It took me a while to realise it was a re-release. The big chase in *Stagecoach* is one of the goddamndest scenes of continuous sustained action up to its time in cinema and it's still a remarkable piece of film-making. It's a big sensation.'

Was Ford as big an influence on him as Peckinpah? 'Well, Griffith influenced Ford, Ford influenced Kurosawa, and you'd have to say that as much as he or Kurosawa influenced Peckinpah, I've been influenced by Ford and Kurosawa *and* Peckinpah. But I think Ford was the best we ever had. I'm fascinated by the way he constantly beat the system. In the mid-1940s he was, in a very conventional sense, the most successful and honoured American film director. But he said, I'm not going to make movies for the big studios, I'm going to make Westerns at Republic. And he somehow made movies that made absolute sense within a body of work. The great thing that's true in Hollywood is that you can still work with people who worked with Ford or Walsh or Hawks. It makes you feel part of a chain—a tradition.'

Whether because of lacklustre marketing, spotty advertising, the uneven reviews or grim subject matter, *Southern Comfort* performed poorly at the American box-office when released in the fall of 1981. But with the aid of Giler, Laszlo and Davies, Hill transformed a story that could have become penny-dreadful into an acute critique of machismo, a dark satire of the military mentality and a bone-chilling exploration of a moral limbo. His craftsmanship has never had a keener edge. Indeed, when I first saw the film in rough cut it seemed to me that he was so intent on a taut, lean narrative line that he didn't give an audience enough rope to hang on to. But throughout post-production he kept reshaping the film for clarity as well as pacing. One of the funniest and most pertinent shots in the film—the entire Bravo Company lined up in a row, shooting off their blank ammunition as the work of the bivouac continues all around them—only made it into Hill's final version.

Months later, Hill was philosophical about the film's financial failure, though he took issue with a few negative reviews. 'Some people complained that the film was elitist because the two most educated characters survive. I consider the philosophy of the film to be a kind of Socratic rationalism. Why shouldn't the most intelligent men be better able to adapt and survive?' Hill recognised that the film's unsentimental point of view might have worked against its popular acceptance: 'In most war movies, you get the sense that no matter how horrible war is, it's somehow character building, or it brings people together in a positive way. In *Southern Comfort*, I deliberately set out to make a movie that could never be described in terms of "the humanist in the foxhole". And the relentlessness of it all might have been hard for audiences to take.'

After the usual run of aborted projects—including a romantic comedy, *Lone Star*, which the producers 'wanted to shade towards *Smokey and the Bandit*' and an adaptation of Jim Harrison's neo-Hemingway novella, *Revenge*, which still might get off the ground—Hill recently started work on *48 Hours*, an original comic suspense story about a white cop (Nick Nolte) and a black convict (played by *Saturday Night Live's* comedy sensation Eddie Murphy) who team up to bag the movie's bad guy. 'All my movies have been character pieces,' Hill says, 'but maybe with this one more people will get the point.' ■

Heat and Industry

'HEAT AND DUST', Merchant Ivory Productions' thirteenth feature film, an adaptation by Ruth Jhabvala of her Booker Prize-winning novel of 1975, will open in London in the autumn. Julie Christie plays Anne, the Englishwoman who arrives in a present-day India full of entanglements to delve into a shrouded episode of family history; and Greta Scacchi her grandfather's first wife Olivia when young, who in 1923 finds herself in the oppressive and disorienting state of Khatm. JOHN PYM visited Hyderabad to observe the filming of some of the period sequences.

Above: Harry (Nickolas Grace) and his host the Nawab of Khatm (Shashi Kapoor). Photos: Christopher Cormack.

Inaction and bureaucracy. Item: Bombay airport (to Western eyes ramshackle beyond words), 2 am, 11 March 1982, seven cartons of rushes and raw stock are irretrievably stuck in customs. The paperwork is in immaculate order but nothing can be done. It is the day after the festival of Holi; things have piled up. An unruffled official turns away in mid-sentence oblivious to the pandemonium around him and briefly attends to other business. Later, it is only a small matter for Ismail Merchant, the consummate fixer, to extricate his property. He is Bombay-born and has been dealing with customs men and their like for twenty-odd years: he has the knack. 'But, believe me, bureaucracy is the same everywhere. Look at the trouble we had getting *The Europeans* registered as a British film.'

But India is different. Item: halfway through shooting, the script is changed. James Ivory, the director, who only under extreme provocation shows signs of disquiet or annoyance, telephones Ruth Jhabvala in Delhi. The Government through the censor will not permit a reference, a telling though hardly approving reference, to the Hindu custom of suttee. Outrage among the players. It is as if, someone observes, films set in nineteenth century Britain could make no mention of capital punishment. The Indian Government, however, has its reasons. Widows no longer throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres; but one still reads, Ivory says, of women burnt to death in circumstances vestigially related to this practice. (Question: Will the TV mini-series *The Far Pavilions*, produced by Goldcrest and the Indian Tobacco Company, run into similar trouble?)

'It is the first time we have been censored,' Ivory admits. This is not, however, the last film Merchant Ivory will make in India. (On the stocks is Charles Wood's adaptation of the John Masters novel *The Deceivers*.) There are ways of surviving, achieving objectives: rushes eventually pass through customs; the script is attended to. One paramount factor for MIP now, in its twentieth year, is that film should follow film, that the momentum be maintained. Money for *Heat and Dust* is coming from Rank, Roger Wingate of the Curzon cinema (which had record-breaking success with *The Europeans*), Channel Four and a number of other sources. Merchant himself has recently shot a fiction/documentary on a community of Bombay courtesans which has also received finance from Channel Four and which he hopes to have finished editing this year.

A family affair. The threads that bind. Walter Lassally, the director of photography on *Heat and Dust*, has been MI's favoured lighting cameraman since *Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilisation*. (Ivory protested that he was too exhausted to direct this TV short on the polymath Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who was then enjoying himself in Oxford tracing linguistic links between East and West, but Merchant, as often, insisted that it was now or never.) For many years

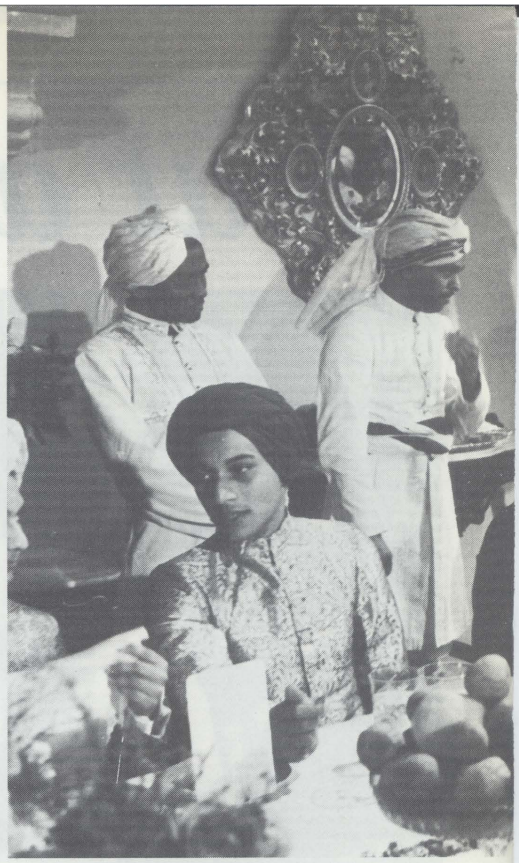
Lassally's agent Kate Campbell resisted appearing in an MI production; she dutifully succumbed in *Heat and Dust*, though not without the occasional forceful remonstration—a grumble over a tiresome family outing. She performed more onerous and hazardous tasks, however (of the sort really only demanded of immediate family members), on *Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures*, another string-and-sealing-wax venture which was shot, like *Adventures of a Brown Man*, largely on the wing.

Dick Robbins, another long-time collaborator (MI produced his short subject *Sweet Sounds* about New York's Mannes School of Music), does double service in Hyderabad. Stepping out of the role of Patient British Gentleman at the Durbar—one of the film's set pieces, which Ivory has been careful to people with appropriate 'faces' to the fore and which is mounted with considerable splendour against a neglected palace exterior repainted in the colours of a Neapolitan ice-cream—he confers with bandleader George Powell, late of the Nizam of Hyderabad's immense private orchestra (one performance a year), over the band's rendition of Dick's composition the Anthem of the Nawab of Khatm. The sound is not exactly sweet, though the effect is appropriately jaunty. The heat does not agree with European musical instruments and Robbins has searched the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad in vain for a tuned piano.

In 1964, Shashi Kapoor, a coming member of a famous family of Indian players, appeared in his second MI production, *Shakespeare-Wallah* (the title was his suggestion). He was the playboy princeling (a man with the dissolute charm of the Nawab of Khatm, his present role) who neglects his girlfriend, a determined Bombay film star (Madhur Jaffrey), in favour of an Indian-born English teenager (Felicity Kendal), an actress who has played Desdemona but never before fallen in love. In *Heat and Dust*, the Nawab exercises a similar charm on a similarly susceptible Englishwoman. Madhur Jaffrey is another company stalwart—she was, most notably perhaps, the Kensington-based Princess in *Autobiography of a Princess*, the script for which, incidentally, Ruth Jhabvala wrote back to back with *Heat and Dust*—as is her first husband, Saeed, one of the few regulars, it seems, who has not been summoned to Hyderabad. In the years since *Shakespeare-Wallah*, Madhur Jaffrey's talents have mushroomed: she now writes fiction and is soon to appear on television instructing us how to cook Indian food. In *Heat and Dust* she is the Begum, the Nawab's mother, and such is the role it is likely that we shall see a fair measure of the delightful cunning she brought to her performance as the Ustad's senior wife in MIP's *The Guru*.

Shashi's wife Jennifer Kendal, Felicity's older sister, has a small part in *Heat and Dust*; she took a small part too in *Shakespeare-Wallah* (under the name 'Jane Bragg'). Like her husband, she goes way back with MIP: in *Bombay Talkie*, she was the pulp Hollywood novelist to Shashi's self-mocking parody of an Indian Film Star. The Kapoors automatically treat the unit as an extension of their family: groups are shepherded up to the Anapurna Studios, a new complex in the outlying Banjara Hills, for screenings of such Kapoor-produced movies as *Junoon* and the recent *36 Chowringhee Lane*. Lines continue to intersect: the latter film is directed by Aparna Sen, the junior wife in *The Guru*; stars Jennifer Kendal, as an elderly Anglo-Indian schoolteacher (with a fondness for *Twelfth Night*), and her father Geoffrey Kendal (Mr Buckingham in *Shakespeare-Wallah*), as the schoolteacher's brother; and is dedicated to the late Bansi Chandragupta, the art director who worked on *The Guru* and many of the films of that early MI influence Satyajit Ray.

Like the Nawab, Shashi Kapoor is a practised master of ceremonies. He observes that the studio is owned by a middle-aged star who still insists on playing bewigged juvenile romantic leads. Shashi himself, whose soulful face stares down from movie posters in Hyderabad (a guidebook claims that the expanding city has some 70 cinemas), has the bearing and figure of a prosperous family man but is still discernibly the hungry young man who played the householder in MI's first film. The union of the Kendals and the Kapoors has produced, one was not surprised to learn, a new generation of players: the teenage Sanjna is her mother's younger self in *Chowringhee Lane*; and her older brother Kunal appears in Hyderabad with Govind Nihalani, the second unit director on *Gandhi*—they are, respectively, appearing in and directing the latest Kapoor venture, 'The Airforce Film', about the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Ismail, who keeps a sharp protective eye on his brood, has no doubt earmarked them for some future MI production.



Securing a motorcar. 'It is always quicker to do things yourself': a Merchant refrain. We are driving through Secundrabad in search of an address in Ismail's book. We ask directions of a policeman: blank incomprehension. Ismail orders the car backwards and forwards, as if we shall reach our destination by sheer force of movement. Passers-by are quizzed: finally, an authoritative old man gets into the car without being invited and directs the driver. We pull up outside the house of a doctor. Ismail, as always, observes the proprieties ('You must take time in these matters': another maxim). We shake hands, everyone is introduced by name. The doctor has assembled his family and friends. Our purpose is to secure the loan of a 30s motorcar for two days' shooting. We stand around an unusable wreck. A car of undoubted worth, but it will take a lot of repairing. Yes, the doctor agrees. Months maybe? Oh, no, years! Ismail on cue: No chance of Saturday. No chance, but I have another ... And, duty done, we pass across the yard to a grey Ford saloon. This will fit the bill.

Ismail then assumes the deal is done. The car will go here, and this side will face the camera, and, of course, you must all visit the location and have lunch with us, yes, all of you. One fender needs touching up. You can do it by Saturday? Good. You know directors and cameramen, they may want the car in a different position with this side visible. Ah, yes, directors and cameramen ... the transaction is fuelled with breathless complicity. The doctor is now a fellow-enthusiast. Would we like a ride? Yes. Ismail drops in a reference to his own imported motorcar in Bombay. We take a spin round the block with the doctor's small daughter sitting in front. Ismail beams: a small victory. An assistant will

Above: Merchant Ivory's most sumptuous feast; below: Durbar ladies—the Begum (Madhur Jaffrey) presiding centre left.

come with delivery instructions. We shake hands: about ten minutes has elapsed from start to finish. We depart and Ismail consults his diary for the day's next task.

A palace banquet. Night. In the reception room of the pavilion of the Purani Haveli Palace, Hyderabad, four immense punkas suspended from the ceiling occasionally flap—tested from the veranda in the limbo time between takes by some unoccupied production assistant. The electric fans, like the director's water-bottles, are reserved for frontline service. The temperature is in the 90s, the players and extras in evening dress. The Purani Haveli is Ivoryland. It is not so much that the decor, the furnishings, the fabric of the building, the formal garden have fallen into disarray—though to an extent they have—but rather that incongruity reigns. Two immensely old palace servants, dressed in faded khaki and black berets, pad about or sit watchfully on chairs by the main doors. The wings of the palace flanking the pavilion are used in part as a technical college: arched niches contain metalwork and carpentry shops, the dressing rooms are a library suite.

The unit has added its own accretion of decor. The Purani Haveli, however, does not match in magnificence the great Faluknama Palace, to the south of Hyderabad, which Ivory has written about in his book on Royal India. There the in-built incongruity is even more startling and awe-inspiring. Constructed during the last quarter of the 19th century to the design of an unknown French architect, it is a fascinating collision of East and West and was in later years used as a place of entertainment for the Viceroys. The WCs at the Purani Haveli are spaciously primitive; but at the Faluknama, one showertap in a guest bedroom reads 'Hot, Cold and Perfumed'. The Purani Haveli does, however, contain one of the legendary artifacts of Hyderabad: the immensely long wardrobe of the Sixth Nizam, judged in his lifetime the world's richest man; not one of his suits, it is said, was worn more than once, but each had to be found cupboard space. All the palaces of Hyderabad are supplied with ornate and particular chandeliers. Even the former Residency, an Adam building stripped of its furniture and fittings and now serving a more functional purpose as a women's college, still has its chandeliers. At the Purani Haveli, there is an immense chandelier mounted on a pedestal: each candle is cupped by a delicate glass shade, several are tilted as though the slightest jolt would dislodge them.

The Purani Haveli banquet is MIP's largest and most sumptuous, although it has nothing as inspired perhaps as Anne Baxter's pearls spilling into the soup. Thirty-six Indian gentlemen and British ladies and gentlemen sit down as the Nawab's guests. I am instructed by the producer to carry home a careful note. It is the end of the main course: chicken bones lie before us; the crested glasses contain, mercifully, drinkable if indeterminate liquid. The art department under Wilfred Shingleton (doubling, appropriately for a gentleman of such aristocratic mien, as the guest of honour, the Governor General) has supplied each guest with reading matter, a handsome gold-trimmed menu card. At the Viceroy's palace in a dark, thin and rather cramped upper room is a dining table which seats 101: one doubts, however, that it ever saw the likes of MIP's feast, which is capped by a contingent of Indian bagpipers stamping in with 'God Save the King' and the Nawab's Anthem.

Candleshades match those on the chandelier in the outer room. The tablecloth is patterned with petals; gold painted pineapples stand between bowls of fruit and small vases of flowers (the associate producer takes a hairspray to the old-fashioned roses). The punkawallahs stir the air; the guests become animated; a master shot is taken. Ismail Merchant, plus moustache and green velvet jacket, is persuaded to sit down at his place at the end of the table farthest from the camera. During the hubbub of the take, he leans over and regales his neighbour with indiscretions. A Telex has arrived from London, the cash for the crew's wages has finally cleared. 'If I was there it would happen like that. You see that man, halfway down the table, doesn't he look exactly right? Only fourteen sat down to dinner in *Savages*. We should have been thirty-seven this evening, but Jim isn't in the shot. On Sunday we'll go to the Faluknama, I shall arrange it, we shall have a picnic.' ■

Robert Cushman

Rodgers & Hart

Writing about the Rodgers and Hart film musicals is probably, I realise as I sit down to it, an impossible task. Their names appear on the credits of more than twenty movies (most were shown in a recent season at the NFT) but there are only a few for which they can be held in any way responsible. On a few they obviously wrote the songs and then got out; on others their work was purchased without the writers getting any nearer to the scene of the crime than their lawyers' office.

The output falls into three categories: the film originals, the adaptations from the stage, the biographies. The last consists of a film and a footnote. The footnote is the 1929 short *Makers of Melody*, in which they pretend to be interviewed about songwriting. Naturally they sound stilted. They reveal nothing except—inadvertently—that Rodgers was a better actor than Hart. That *is* surprising. He is supposed to have been the straight man of the team, offsetting Hart's verbal cynicism with soaring melodies. 'Laugh that off, Hart,' he snaps at one point, and it's the sharpest timing in the picture. It is certainly unchallenged by the versions of 'Manhattan', 'The Girl Friend' and 'The Blue Room' offered by singers apparently chosen for their vapidity, reinforcing all the worst rumours about the musical theatre of the 1920s.

The full bio *Words and Music* (1948) bears a surprising resemblance to *Makers of Melody*. Tom Drake has the Rodgers profile, and if Mickey Rooney overacts Hart, then so did Hart. I like Rooney's performance; its manic-depressive extremes tally with what is recorded of Hart's own behaviour; they seem melodramatic only because Hollywood could not mention Hart's homosexuality and had no intention of mentioning his drunkenness. The film has to rely on his self-consciousness about his height or lack of it; this is historical, he *did* wear elevator shoes, but it's unlikely that his final collapse occurred outside the shop where he generally bought them. The shopfront, incidentally, is part of one of the most uncomfortably stylised sets in movie history. But then the whole film is uncertain in its mix of conventions. When is Tom Drake Tom Drake and when is he Rodgers? (Brecht would have boggled at the alienation.) Why does Perry Como, who is supposed to be playing someone called Eddie, suddenly become himself at the end of the picture? Mel Tormé, Judy Garland and Gene Kelly appear unambiguously as themselves, singing and dancing in what were then their contemporary styles. Since these styles were forged at least a decade after the material they were meant to be performing, it is no wonder that the picture is coy about chronology. From 'Manhattan' (1925) on, all the songs are given the '48 sound. Perhaps MGM thought the public incapable of accepting anything else; perhaps they thought their own style unarguably superior. Probably both. Plus they didn't care.

One shouldn't tease an acknowledged bad film. (Actually I have some affection for it; it was my second introduction—after Ella Fitzgerald's Songbook album—to Rodgers and Hart, and it taught me some great songs.) But it does contain interesting pointers to the relationship between Rodgers and Hart on the one hand and Hollywood on the other. Though it contains a lengthy, mildly satirical sequence set in Hollywood, it includes none of the songs they actually wrote there; the score is drawn almost entirely from their Broadway output. The film respects this work, but is curiously shy of it. The script trades on the self-pity that Hart transmuted and universalised in his best lyrics; he mutters a few words of 'Spring Is Here' ('maybe it's because nobody loves me') or the soundtrack orchestra offers a few bars of 'My Funny Valentine'—obviously self-dedicated. It's an affecting moment, if you know the lyric. (In the film as originally planned we would all have known it since Betty Garrett would have sung it in an earlier scene.)

But these are teasers, unfulfilled in the musical portions. The great masochistic songs—'Spring Is Here', 'Glad to Be Unhappy', 'It Never Entered My Mind'—go unsung. (They still await respectable film performance.) Ann Sothern's 'Where's That Rainbow' ('it is easy to see all right/ev'rything's gonna be all right/be just dandy for everybody but me') is undercut by the arrival of a girls' chorus announcing that they have found that rainbow after all. So *that's* all right. Unfortunately, this is the only version of the song that most people, especially disc jockeys, have ever heard. *Words and Music* can just about cope with the jolly cynicism of 'I Wish I Were in Love Again' or the flip tenderness—which is basic Rodgers and Hart—of 'Thou Swell', though they cut the first verse. But the shrugged-off pain—the most distinctive thing about the partnership—had to go.

Their work was not treated much better when their shows were translated to the screen. Only one, *Jumbo*, was filmed in the era of respect for stage scores (in 1962, nearly thirty years after its Broadway première) and even that was adulterated by the addition of Roger Edens' 'Sawdust, Spangles and Dreams'. *Pal Joey* (1957) should have qualified; there

Left to right:

'Words and Music': Tom Drake (Rodgers) and Mickey Rooney (Hart).

Frank Albertson and Inez Courtney in 'Spring Is Here'.

Ben Lyon and Ona Munson in 'The Hot Heiress'.

Harry Langdon and Al Jolson in 'Hallelujah I'm a Bum'.

George M. Cohan in 'The Phantom President'.

was no question of adding additional songs for the movie companies to publish (standard practice before the war). Songs *were* added, but they were Rodgers and Hart classics from other shows; one can almost see Columbia's point since the score of *Pal Joey* is probably the most overrated in the history of Broadway. It tries very hard to be tough; and, interestingly enough, succeeds more often in its music than its lyrics. Rodgers was the real muscle of the operation, the survivor, even if his subsequent scores with Oscar Hammerstein veered towards sentimentality. But of course the changes in the *Pal Joey* film weren't made for aesthetic reasons. The original's special merit is its unity of tone, but since that tone was a dark one it had to be prettied up. Some misanthropy still hung around, and Sinatra's vocals are classics, but it was, like many of its time, a plastic movie.

Earlier R & H films had at any rate made no pretence of respecting the stage material. *Higher and Higher* (1940) was changed almost entirely into a vehicle for the younger Sinatra; *I Married an Angel* (1942) became Macdonald-Eddy fodder. *Babes in Arms* lost all but two of its songs, and *On Your Toes* lost them all: ironically since it had originally been planned as an Astaire-Rogers movie vehicle. (It offends one's sense of symmetry that Astaire, who sang scores by Youmans, Porter, Berlin, Gershwin, Kern, Arlen and Schwartz—all the other Broadway giants—never worked with Rodgers.) *Too Many Girls* (1940) was a happier event; it retained its Broadway director, George Abbott, and some of his cast; it also kept the collegiate atmosphere that adhered to Rodgers and Hart almost throughout their career: the sense of smart kids growing up by falling in love. Even some of Hart's bawdy managed to creep in. *The Boys from Syracuse* (1940) also got some respect, though 'Falling in Love with Love' was dumbly treated as any old romantic song. Actually it's a frustration song. Rodgers offset a bitter-sweet lyric with a magnificent waltz melody. The producers merely heard the lilt and saw the word 'love' in the title.

Then there are the films that take us back to prehistory: the yacht-set comedies *Heads Up* and *Spring Is Here* (both 1930). These are faithful versions of 20s musical shows from which most of the songs happen to have been lopped off. *Heads Up* is very heavy but *Spring Is Here* is a joy, despite remarkably arbitrary camera set-ups that leave important characters half out of frame. There is a girl with two suitors and a genuinely funny father. There is a kid sister and *her* suitor. (They sing 'Spring Is Here In Person', not to be confused with.) There is very nearly extra-marital sex. Again the score is butchered (and oddly enough the main interpolation, Harry Warren's 'Crying for the Carolines', is scampered through) but a crazy, frothy tone remains.

Is it authentic Rodgers and Hart? One thing it lacks, that their best screen originals possessed in abundance, was class conflict. Their first effort, *The Hot Heiress* (1931), features Ben Lyon as an all-American artisan. 'Nobody Loves a Riveter but his Mother' he proclaims, more or less in song, and it takes him time to be sure that rich girl Ona Munson is an exception. She proves one of the most persistent heroines in the history of Hollywood, continually changing apartments in the building he works on, so as to bring herself up to his level. This is fantasy at least tinged with reality; Lyon sings, so to speak, on the job. For its time it is, to wrest a line from *Once in a Lifetime*, a welcome change from the avalanche of backstage musicals. It isn't coy about song.

Maybe this was the studio's or the director's (Clarence Badger) idea, and Rodgers and Hart just went along with it. But they certainly were the moving spirits in their next project: the great *Love Me Tonight* (1932). Their songs preceded the script and they set the tone—elegant, erotic, self-mocking—that is maintained in director Rouben Mamoulian's cascade of visual jokes. How we cheer when Jeanette Macdonald on horseback overtakes Maurice Chevalier on a train. Their rich-girl poor-boy romance is re-enacted, in more sombre tones, by Al Jolson and Madge Evans in *Hallelujah I'm a Bum*, justly famous as the only musical to take serious note of the Depression. Jolson leads a gang of hoboes living in Central Park, and when he sings 'What Do You Want with Money' he seems to mean it. He acts better, with more warmth and more urgency, than in any other film, though you realise why he needed blackface; his natural features are unmemorable.

Between these two pictures came *The Phantom President* (1932), the discovery of the NFT season. Its first revelation is the performance, virtually his only film role, of George M. Cohan. I expected a barnstormer; but discovered an impeccably differentiated account of a dual role. Cohan plays a stuffy presidential candidate and his breezy double, a medicine-show man who supplants him in his election campaign, in the affections of Claudette Colbert and—a denouement you don't expect the film to risk—in the White House itself. As political satire it outclasses Gershwin's still-to-be-written *Of Thee I Sing*.

These three films, with *The Hot Heiress* and *Spring Is Here* as happy additions, are the Rodgers and Hart film masterpieces. All preceded the Hays Office clamp-down, and none would have been permitted after it. By that time the partners had returned to Broadway, writing a dazzling series of songs for mostly unrevivable shows. Their return visits to Hollywood were few and undistinguished but their earlier pictures are durable wholes; far more so than their stage pieces.

The catch is that they contain few outstanding individual songs. The one ballad in *The Phantom President*, 'Give Her a Kiss', is mocked; birds sing it, Disney fashion, while Cohan fails to seduce Colbert. The big number is a convention scene in which Cohan's aide, Jimmy Durante, eggs on a mindless succession of delegations to vote for his boss: a virtuoso piece of shooting by Norman Taurog, the future director of *Words and Music*. The score of *Love Me Tonight* is more expansive but equally subordinate to the picture as a whole; 'Lover' and 'Isn't It Romantic' became famous, but only with much altered lyrics. Only 'You Are Too Beautiful' in *Hallelujah I'm a Bum* belongs in the great Rodgers and Hart tradition of serenades to the unattainable. It presents, in Hart's best manner, a closely argued case for suffering. This kind of ballad is what he was best at: his joke songs are often surprisingly clumsy, and the celebrated rhyming dialogue which he used in films as a lead-in to song has little more than curiosity value. Rodgers by contrast could write anything. He eventually progressed, with Hammerstein, to the 'integrated' stage musical, a good ten years after pioneering with Hart the integrated film musical. In between there was a decade of great unanchored songs. The balance of profit and loss is a curious one. ■

Fitzcarraldo (Klaus Kinski) and the 'Molly Aida'.

Ship on a mountain

Fitzcarraldo/Tom Milne

We seem to have been here before. The very name Fitzcarraldo, corrupted from Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald because the Peruvian Indians had difficulty with the pronunciation, might have been invented expressly for Werner Herzog to make a film about. Not to mention the bizarre history of this quintessential 19th century loser who turned himself, almost inadvertently, into a millionaire rubber tycoon by manhandling a steamboat across a mountain so that he could open up the jungle and (here Herzog's imagination helped a little) fulfil his dream of gracing it with an opera house.

The sense of *déjà vu* is instantaneous and inevitable as *Fitzcarraldo* (Artificial Eye) opens with the camera panning down over the steamy jungle in echo of the extraordinary shot of clouds racing through the treetops near the beginning of *Heart of Glass*, and as Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald quickly proves himself destined to a foolhardy river journey likely to leave him as marooned in madness as the hero of *Aguirre, Wrath of God*. But this jungle, as it turns out, is not tinged with apocalypse like the one in *Aguirre* or the forest in *Heart of Glass*; nor is Fitzcarraldo treated, like Aguirre, with an awe that overlays the satirical jabs at his vaulting ambition. Herzog, in fact, seems to have left his mysticism at home, allowing him to portray Fitzcarraldo (Klaus Kinski) with a pleasantly mundane mixture of affection and objective curiosity. Compared to Aguirre's vision of conquest, which might have made of him a new Alexander the Great or a new Adolf Hitler, Fitzcarraldo's dream is small beer indeed. And Herzog goes out of his way to make it even smaller.

Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald's passion is introduced in an opening scene at the opera house in Manaus. Arriving late, dishevelled and ticketless after a 1000-mile trip down river from the interior with his devoted admirer, the brothel madame Molly (Claudia Cardinale), Fitzcarraldo is allowed in only because his wild-eyed distress evokes an answering sympathy from a similarly besotten (and black) usher. The opera (actually staged by Werner Schroeter) is a deliriously tacky *Ernani*, starring Caruso and Sarah Bernhardt, the latter complete with wooden leg and vocal dubber accompanying her mime from the orchestra pit. But as Hernani-Caruso stabs himself and raises his hand in dramatic appeal to the audience, both Molly and Fitzcarraldo take it to be a regal summons. 'He means me!' the latter murmurs ecstatically.

There follows an ambivalent scene where Fitzcarraldo, alone in his sordid shack, obligingly puts on a Caruso recording for a circle of adoring Indian children, meanwhile assuring a small black pig that it will have a box of its own when his opera house finally becomes a reality. Later, hoping to secure finance for his project, Fitzcarraldo brings his beloved records along to a reception to which the faithful Molly has invited all the rubber barons. Nobody, with the possible exception of a couple of native servants, is prepared to listen, and the enraged Fitzcarraldo launches into an impassioned defence of music as an expression of man's greatest feelings.

Then, capping the missionary theme as it were, the extraordinary sequence in which the ship steams placidly up river into savage Indian territory from which no traveller can hope to return alive, the crew fearfully eyeing the impenetrable jungle in which nothing can be seen, only ominous drums heard. 'Now it's Caruso's turn,' Fitzcarraldo announces. A hallucinating Herzogian shot of the now seemingly deserted ship ploughing on, an ancient loudspeaker gramophone perched like a figurehead on the bridgework. And suddenly the drumming is stilled, leaving Caruso's majestically scratchy voice as lord of the jungle.

Yet when Fitzcarraldo finally achieves a transient approximation of his dream—after discovering that the failure of his expedition has ironically turned into a triumph, he acquires money enough to hire an opera company to stage a private performance on the ship—his chief preoccupation rather punctures the grand, proselytising idea: where is the small black pig, for whom a promise must be kept? What Herzog has done here, disarmingly, is to present a man who has a dream, who aches to share that dream with anybody who will listen, but who never for a moment envisages imposing it by conquest or *force majeure*.

Fitzcarraldo, in other words, may live an exceptional adventure but he is not an exceptional man. A point which Herzog stresses by matching his 'madness' against the equal folly of almost every other character in the film. Molly, who throws good money after bad by blindly backing Fitzcarraldo in any crackbrained scheme he can dream up (bringing ice to the jungle, building a station to await a railway). The stout and stolid ship's captain, almost blind but persuaded that he has a sixth sense to avert danger by distinguishing between reality and hallucination. The rubber tycoon who hurls wads of banknotes into a fishpond, yearning to experience the thrill of knowing what it feels like to go bankrupt. The solitary official left in charge of the derelict and still virginal railway station, proudly guarding something which has almost reverted into the jungle. Even the Indian chief, who lends his tribe in support of Fitzcarraldo's scheme to haul his steamboat over the mountain, meanwhile secretly dreaming of sinking it in the rapids on the other side to placate the spirits of the river. So rife is the mysterious lure of folly that it becomes almost a password between the characters, until even the villainous Cholo, foisted on the expedition as a spy, becomes a hero and smilingly offers his hand in admiration when he realises the enormity of what Fitzcarraldo is up to.

It's a beguiling notion, beguilingly expressed in a film which deliberately punctures its own pretensions along with those of its characters, while fabricating anticlimaxes out of their pinnacles of ecstasy or despair. You expect Caruso and choral hosannas to hit the soundtrack at the very moment when the steamboat finally noses over the brow of the mountain, but in fact Herzog displaces the benison to an off-peak moment. You expect the ship to go over the rapids and founder with all hands in

glorious Götterdämmerung, but in fact it survives, perkily wagging its tail.

This is not to say that *Fitzcarraldo* is not spectacular or exciting (which it is), but rather to suggest that Herzog has been at some pains to avoid leaving audiences mystically stranded, as so often before and however pleasurably, amid the clouds of unknowing. It is worth noting, on the one hand, that he goes to the trouble of providing a map of Fitzcarraldo's itinerary, expounded in detail so that one understands the precise logic of his reasoning. On the other, fringing the mystique of savage superstition, there is the sequence where Fitzcarraldo is told by his interpreter of the Indian belief that a white god in a great vessel will show them a land without sorrow or death. Finally arriving on board, the Indians silently gather round Fitzcarraldo, fingering his shock of yellow hair, touching palms with him in a wonderfully moving gesture (only Bresson is better at the language of hands). At which point the interpreter explains the woundingly matter-of-fact situation: 'They know we're not gods, but the ship really impressed them.' The charm of the film, which shows no sign of its notorious troubles in the making, is that it is very, but not too, Herzog. □

'England's fault or Anderson's?'

Britannia Hospital/Chris Auty

The sum of the parts of *Britannia Hospital* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) looks impressive: this is the state-of-the-nation film par excellence, observing an institution—the NHS hospital—full of cultural resonances; it is a Hogarth cartoon for the 1980s, a relentless caricature of crisis and vice at every level; it is, to judge by the standing ovation at Cannes, going to prove popular in Europe at least; it is a classicist's vision of human folly, from which any trace of compassion has been drained, in which everything appears open to ruthless examination. But it is not great cinema. Or middling cinema. It is, finally, a catalogue of frustrations rather than a film.

'One cannot escape the feeling that Anderson's energies are unresolved and that his rather prickly talent has never been fully expressed. England's fault or Anderson's?' David Thomson asked in 1975. The question still stands. *Britannia Hospital* is less acute, less funny and more derivative than the fourteen-year-old *If....*, the film which first created the Malcolm McDowell/Mick Travis character. Although Travis has grown up, moved 'from Liverpool to Nebraska', become a hot-shot reporter, he has retained the same frenetic cynicism. But that cynicism is not connected to circumstance and environment with anything like the ingenuity or inevitability that bound Travis to his school in *If....*, or which led to the angry fantasies of apocalypse at the end of that film. In *Britannia Hospital* the forces of destruction—in the immediate sense—come from outside, in the form of fanatical demonstrators. The seeds of annihilation and release are not organic to the institution, the flagship hospital, on which the director expends his bile. England's fault or Lindsay Anderson's?

It must also be said that *Britannia Hospital* disappoints on a purely technical level. Fragments of conversation and information are left unresolved; occasional continuity errors intrude. That unevenness need not have mattered. More important, though, is a pervasive lack of structure. The film opens with its best joke (a terminal patient whose admission to hospital is endlessly delayed by the bureaucratic rhetoric of the staff on strike) and ends with its worst (the crazed Frankenstein surgeon, Professor Millar, finally presents his new human for a brave new world, a creature of pure intellect who, it turns out, can only endlessly intone: 'What a piece of work is man ... how like a God ... how like a God ... how like a God'). In between these two gags the film picks up a score of characters, like some snowball gathering momentum as it gathers weight. But when all these characters are in fact parody-figures from a comedy of manners, weight is the least of their attributes, and we are left with a narrative accumulation which becomes more frenzied and less energetic as every minute passes. One can see how the device *should* have worked. In the event, it merely comes across as a miscalculation on the part of the screenplay.

Unfortunately, too, there is a difficulty of *address*: the comedy of social type which worked so fiercely in *I'm All Right Jack* (a film to which *Britannia Hospital* bears some resemblance) has over the years become the province of television. From *Steptoe and Son* to the *Two Ronnies*, the lampooning of class and social issues has been spun out to extraordinarily inventive lengths (in a series like *Last of the Summer Wine* it even seems to have come full circle: the types are no longer caricatures of existing figures but subtly individual re-creations of abstractions from the British dream). In its way, even the 'absurd' streak of TV humour (*Monty Python, Not the Nine O'Clock News*) poses a problem for *Britannia Hospital*—those series have been more anarchic, gone further, been ruder. Where can the film touch us that we have not already been touched before? And a simpler question must also be asked: in a year when cinema admissions fell to an all-time low of 86 million, is there any excuse for a film so significantly cast from TV (Leonard Rossiter in very thin disguise as the Hospital Administrator)? Or for a film which adopts the cumulative sketch-by-sketch form of a TV comedy hour? It is this mistaken address, more TV than anything else, that marks *Britannia Hospital* as the work of a director who is insufficiently enquiring.

Intended as an angrily satiric fantasy, *Britannia Hospital* seems insufficiently stylised for its purpose—it does not achieve the kind of classical distance that would then permit a retrospective grimace. Some scenes (the drug-addled TV reporters in their van; the knees-up in which kitchen staff find solidarity with caterers from Fortnum's) seem merely inane; others (the retired general complaining that he didn't spend 'fifty years in the army to end up bedding down with a bunch of wogs') are lamely irritating. The satire in the former and the provocation in the latter are simply not achieved. Even the simplest running gag—that the telephones never work—acquires a kind of shrill predictability.

The comedy works best when it comes

'Britannia Hospital': a relentless caricature of crisis and vice.

out of the grey and into the black: in a desperate bid to reconnect the power during a strike by ancillary workers one of the administrators strikes down a member of staff with a shovel, and the camera lingers to observe the prone figure and split skull oozing blood on to the boiler room floor. A deeper vein of humour has been tapped; a blow struck home. The effect is rather similar when we first see a policeman viciously assaulting a fallen demonstrator: in both cases the sense of shock comes from an ambivalent realisation—that the specific instance is wild and fantastical but that the symbolic thrust (anarchy masked in the garb of authority) is true, strong, provocative. The moments shock, too, because—precisely—they could not be shown on television. Their violence and their fantasy is excessive. The effect is one of cinema. And unfortunately, the effect comes too rarely to give *Britannia Hospital* the energy (however brittle, pesky, even pedantic) that it so desperately needs.

Britannia Hospital has already received some adverse comment, politically, from both right and left. Lindsay Anderson, who sees the film as an anarchic provocation, is probably delighted. But the film's engagement with politics of any shade seems to me superficial: the bolshie shop steward; the brainless aristocrat; the crusty general; even the ranting Third World demagogues who whip up the crowd outside the hospital ... all are well-established gnomes in the British imaginary landscape. They exist *within* the confines of race and class from which the film is made, and never threatens (except perhaps in the instances cited above) to step outside: these are white, upper-class, middle-aged fantasies. Anderson is ex-Cheltenham, ex-Oxford. And his satire is an appropriate production to come from that background. It is almost, in fact, a lexicon of those clichés. It is certainly not the caustic and truly *national* satire which it intends.

Finally, sadly, it seems important to make a wider cultural observation. The kind of Augustan roots evident in *Britannia Hospital* do not reach very far into the popular imagination. Anderson has in fact made a film from which all romanticism has been cauterised (even though, paradoxically, its central image of Frankenstein defying God and Nature in the creation of a monster is a Romantic one). He has made a film from which it is hard to draw a sense of personal commitment—even to laughter. Without a sense of the author, and without a sense of its audience, *Britannia Hospital* seems to have come from precisely that cultural wasteland which the film would like to mock. □

Exploitation and despair

The Herd/Martyn Auty

Yilmaz Guney has described the genesis of *Sürü* (BFI), begun in 1973 in Selimiye prison and completed in 1978 in Izmit prison (where he was serving 24 years on a highly dubious murder indictment), as a gradual process of committing to paper the film's 'abstract form', its key images and scraps of information gleaned from friends on the outside who brought him documents, photographs, tapes of music—raw material to build a story.

His long periods of incarceration (nearly ten years in the last two decades) have forced Guney to make films by proxy: *Sürü* (*The Herd*) itself was mainly scripted in a room shared by eighty other prisoners and directed by Zeki Ökten acting on instructions from Guney. But imprisonment has also cut Guney off from the wider film culture which might have shaped his work and within which, reciprocally, he would undoubtedly have exerted a more influential role. (Guney has subsequently escaped from prison and is now living in Europe.)

To locate *Sürü* in relation to European cinematic traditions (principally Italian neo-realism) as some critics have done is dangerously Eurocentric, for although in interviews (*Cinéma 80* No 262 and *Linkskurve*) Guney has acknowledged the influences of Fellini, De Sica, Antonioni, Visconti and Germi, he also cites Godard, the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* and the Mexican work of Emilio Fernandez as films of considerable personal impact. In addition Guney was a leading movie actor in Turkey before turning director in 1970 and this film must at least in part be indebted to Turkish popular cinema.

The opening sequence, however, has more in common with Sergio Leone than any neo-realist antecedent, as the three brothers from the Halilan family ride up to parley with the Veriskyans, age-old enemies in a blood feud which has been

Berivan (Melike Demirag).

rekindled by the marriage of their sister Berivan to Sivan, son of the Veriskyan elder. A Western-style face-out between representatives of the two clans establishes the tension and subsequent scenes (Sivan taking Berivan to the doctors observed watchfully from across the street, and an outburst of gunfire that creates panic as the Veriskyans herd their sheep aboard the train for Ankara) carry strong resonances of both Italian and Hollywood westerns.

The film is shaped around a sheep-drive by the nomadic Veriskyans from the sparse pastures of the interior to the livestock market in Ankara. But this linear structure is overlaid with other, often more important motivation: Sivan's increasingly desperate search for a doctor to cure the ailing Berivan, his father's need to sell the herd so that the family might survive the next winter, and Guney's desire to force a confrontation between the impoverished lifestyle of the shepherds and the demographic changes taking place in his country: industrialisation and the conversion of ancient sheep pasture to arable land.

Throughout this multi-layered but clearly articulated narrative, Guney's characters—all rugged individualists—follow their fated paths to the exploitation and despair that awaits them at the end of the line, in Ankara. And yet the action of the film is lively and well-paced—a dramatic sheep stampede, a cunningly mounted raid on the train by sheep stealers. Even in the Ankara sequences, where the inescapable knowledge that Berivan will not be cured and Sivan may lose his sanity weighs heavily, the film maintains its momentum, pointing connections between the clan feuds of the desert country (where everyone carries a rifle) and the internecine political violence on the streets of the capital.

Guney serves his cultural traditions faithfully, offering a respectful, though never romantic perspective on the nomadic lifestyle and its rare pleasures (chiefly music as played on windpipes and drums), but by dumping his 'medieval' shepherd folk on the doorstep of Ankara's sprawling working population, he accentuates the violent culture clash, notable in an agonising sequence where Sivan's city cousins take the hapless shepherd and his terminally sick wife to a cheap cabaret in the artisan suburbs.

Optimism is hard to discern in the film's concluding episodes though the role of a Marx-inspired youth, a member of the family with whom Sivan and Berivan stay in Ankara, arguably points a political direction for the poor and exploited struggling to stay alive either in the harsh scrublands of the interior or in the haphazard urban growth of the city. The road to political activism—here encapsulated in the familiar metaphor of the poor peasant journeying to the big city—is both inherently dramatic and unquestionably vital to the emergence of a new national cinema in Turkey hitherto contained by censorship, the encouragement of facile mass entertainment movies and the persecution of politically controversial film-makers. □

The narrator (Ronan Hubert) and his mother (Bernadette Lesache).

A sense of place

The Proud Ones/Chris Petit

This seemingly uncharacteristic Chabrol film forsakes more familiar territory—the transgressions of the French bourgeoisie—for a simple and sturdy recreation of proud peasant life in Brittany during the early part of this century. Instead of the more typical subject of individual murder—the last resort of true feeling and self-respect for Chabrol's bourgeoisie—he takes a wider theme of murderous poverty that conjures a vivid, hallucinatory imagination which leads either to self-destruction or to a hard-won dignity. 'Too poor that I am to possess another animal,' says the grandfather of the family central to *The Proud Ones* (Gala), 'at least the horse of pride will always have a place in my stable.' Chabrol has described how he was drawn to the intensity of Breton imagination with its keen and profound feelings of death and of life as a kind of precarious daily triumph over death. One can see the attraction (and the nostalgia) for him: the power of this imagination is precisely the quality denied Chabrol's more sophisticated characters.

There are other more direct connections to Chabrol's earlier work. Landscape, community and family, the inseparable elements of *The Proud Ones*, have fascinated him since his first film, *Le Beau Serge*. *Le Boucher* had an equally rooted sense of place. Both it and *The Proud Ones* begin with an elaborately staged wedding feast. However, it is the very end of *The Proud Ones* that most recalls *Le Boucher* and its premise: a man returns home from war to take up his simple life again. In *Le Boucher* there is one crucial difference: the man brings home death with him and the tranquil region to which he returns is disrupted by murder. Despite the apparently calm ending of *The Proud Ones*, the community is also threatened by destruction, albeit more general and widespread. One can define the very obvious similarities and differences between the two films with almost exactly the same phrase: *Le Boucher* is about death in the community, *The Proud Ones* about death of the community. The Breton peasants, fiercely protective of their own culture and language and independence from the rest of France, find their life gradually changed and eroded by forces from outside.

The film's most memorable moments juxtapose images of life and work unchanged for generations with sudden brief intrusions of progress. Bicycles replace horses, the cinema arrives in place of the travelling show, steam and electricity alter the landscape (and are greeted by the locals with a mixture of scepticism and awe). But progress exacts its toll. The resilience, culled from centuries of being with and of the land, and the pride and humility it bestows (that 'fineness of feeling' Michael Walker and Robin Wood find in Chabrol's work) will be dispersed not by its traditional enemy, poverty, but, paradoxically, by an encroaching affluence. (With very little effort one could imagine *The Proud Ones* as a Western.) Learning is a mixed blessing: the postman, the first of the locals to learn how to read, finds this an increasingly heavy responsibility because bad news has to be read by him to the receiver. He indulges in a benign censoring by destroying such letters to spare everyone's feelings, not least his own.

However, the film is more than a sentimental testament to the passing of proud customs and traditions, although these are recreated in meticulous detail. A series of bright, painterly tableaux, beautifully photographed, recreate village life. (Some English reviewers have complained about the picturesque cleanliness of the film in the mistaken assumption that poverty is necessarily dirty.) A slow, measured pace conveys the feeling of the annual round where life is played out as a series of rituals that invoke a sense of fate reminiscent of the medieval concept of Fortune. Misery (called 'The World Bitch' by the Bretons) recurs after plenty as inevitably as dark follows light. When the men go off to the trenches of the First World War ('The World Bitch was baring its fangs again'), the women, in a scene that seems like something from five hundred years earlier, sell their hair to travelling markets for money.

Primarily, however, and most successfully, *The Proud Ones* is about childhood. The best-selling book on which the film is based, *Le Cheval d'Orgueil* by Pierre-Jakes Hélias, chronicles four decades in semi-autobiographical form. Significantly, Chabrol and his scenarist, Daniel Boulanger, confine themselves to the first eleven years of the narrator's life. Narration is emphasised as an act of memory. The adult narrator (never seen) recalls life from the time of his parents' wedding until his father's return from war. The narration makes little conscious use of the benefit of hindsight but strives instead to recall the limited perspectives of childhood, or, rather, a translation of those limited perspectives, perhaps best summarised by the memory, 'Our house seemed filled with gods and silence.'

Although one usually associates Chabrol with the darker side of family life—in Paul Eluard's words, 'The terrible serpents' nest of blood relations'—he has acknowledged the eminence of the family in films like *La Femme Infidèle*. Here he goes even further. The family is presented entirely uncritically: mother, father and grandfather are portrayed (and acted) with total affection and reverence. Indeed, pettiness, that overriding vice of the bourgeoisie, is conspicuous by its absence. More than that, the family is elevated to a position of sanctity, a point most obviously made when the narrator (without any sense of irony) refers his own birth to Georges de la Tour's painting of the Nativity. (One waits for Chabrol's sly, sceptical sense of humour to intrude, but it remains confined to the peripheries.)

Religious symbolism abounds, emphasising life as a fallen state, childhood as a fall from innocence, and, on a wider level, the imminent fall of the community as its collective innocence is eroded from outside. If the film fails to achieve the sombre radiance of, say, Bresson, it is because Chabrol has difficulty incorporating material immediately outside the seen subject. *The Proud Ones* is most assured when describing its own landscape, much less so in dealing with the abstract qualities that attracted Chabrol to the subject. Physical recreations of the grandfather's folklore tales intrude awkwardly rather than lifting the film to another level. Towards the end, as Brittany loses its cultural and political battles against the rest of France, the lack of social, political and economic

perspective is increasingly apparent, although it could be thinly argued that the bewildering presentation of these upheavals is consistent with the rest of the narration in being recalled from a child's viewpoint.

The film finishes more certainly with landscape, community and family all briefly reunited. The serenity of this final scene, which echoes the beginning and brings the film full circle, is made more poignant by our awareness of irrevocable change waiting beyond the horizon. A way of life about to vanish hangs in the balance and the closing of the circle emphasises what is about to be lost. It seems appropriate, for Chabrol perhaps more than for the film, that it should end on a note of false promise. □

Tabletalk

My Dinner with André

Julian Jebb

This piquant and surprising duologue (Cinegate) is about the meeting of two men who have knocked about the New York theatre world and dine together, after an absence, at a posh Manhattan restaurant. For one hundred and ten minutes they talk; or rather André Gregory is loquacious and Wally Shawn attentive.

They play, as it were, themselves. Gregory is the very figure of the conscious, privileged (that is spoiled) Western intellectual, a theatre director who goes over and over, and on and on, about the agonies of conscience and the moments of illumination which have occurred to *him* in Tibet, Poland, Morocco, Scotland and New York. He has no poetry and even less humour, but he has energy and the kind of seriousness which can be exasperating to an English audience. He indulges at great length in that peculiar form of American manners: philosophical autobiography. To the British this can seem outrageous egotism dressed up as the 'discussion' of ideas. He has opinions on everything from being mock buried alive by a group of Grotowski-inspired improvisers, to eating, and later throwing up, mouthfuls of sand. He is experimental. And he lets Wally and the audience know it.

Wally is the listener. An actor-playwright with no great pretensions but with an almost mystically benevolent capacity to listen and, when he feels like it, suddenly to be very funny. At first his shambling, balding presence prepares the audience for a fall guy. He is meeting his more adventurous (and richer) buddy. The staff of the restaurant are none too pleased to see him in his rumpled suit earlier than his host, who is chic in a discreet dark green cardigan. Wally chooses the same main course (quails) as André. The head waiter, a wonderfully chilling performance by Jean Lenauer, twitches loomingly.

There is no emphasis on the food or the other diners, but equally they are there, mentioned as it were, part of the scenery in this profoundly artful film. We are aware of Wally eating the expensive food, but have no recollection of the apparently more civilised man, André, ever touching it. Clearly, as the script is attributed to both performers, it is not meant as it turns out—a triumphant but not in the least philistine hymn to the values of, well, bourgeois life.

When this duologue was performed as a rehearsal for the film a few years ago at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, the audience was smart—not New York smart, which means clever and quick-witted, but languorously aware that the play might be a weird occasion which it would be worth later boasting about having seen. I remember the early restlessness of the audience at the performance I attended. Then the gradual capitulation to the remarkable performances, followed by the sort of ovation which I associate more with Wagner than fringe plays. The trick, of course, was surprise.

A long, apparently naturalistic piece of dialogue was in fact a clever exposition of character: Wally's gradually increasing excitement at describing his life—his electric blanket, his pleasure in reading the autobiography of Charlton Heston, his relationship to his girlfriend Debbie—appear at first as interruptions to the manic articulacy of André. But we root for Wally, for his shining, comic integrity; we are amazed that André can subject himself not only to playing, but clearly sanctioning, the pretensions that he utters. And yet we do not leave either the play or the film laughing at André. The principals like each other, and the fact that the less voluble and decent of the two is also the more charming sets up a delightful speculation: what would a play called *My Dinner with Wally* be like?

That this entertainment should be directed by Louis Malle is lip-smacking stuff. The skill shown by the director of *Le Feu Follet*, *Le Souffle au Coeur*, *Viva Maria!* and *Atlantic City* should come as no surprise—everything Malle does is a surprise. But the wonderful cleverness (and luck) about the film is that the director is one of the few Europeans who have understood America without patronage or sycophancy but with a sort of awed detachment. He looks on the comic scene in a way perhaps no native director could. Apart from the understated opening there are no cinematic gestures in the film; its style depends entirely on the size of shot that Malle chooses and the timing of the cuts. Malle has been bold enough to allow some of André Gregory's longer speeches to be filmed entirely without cutaways of Wally watching; whereas some of Wally's interjections, which increase in length and confidence as the dinner progresses, are shot so that we see André's profile, hawklike and a little superior, in a mirror behind the table. The result is continually absorbing. Our initial exasperation at André's high falutin' ideas yields to respect, a feeling shared by Wally all along.

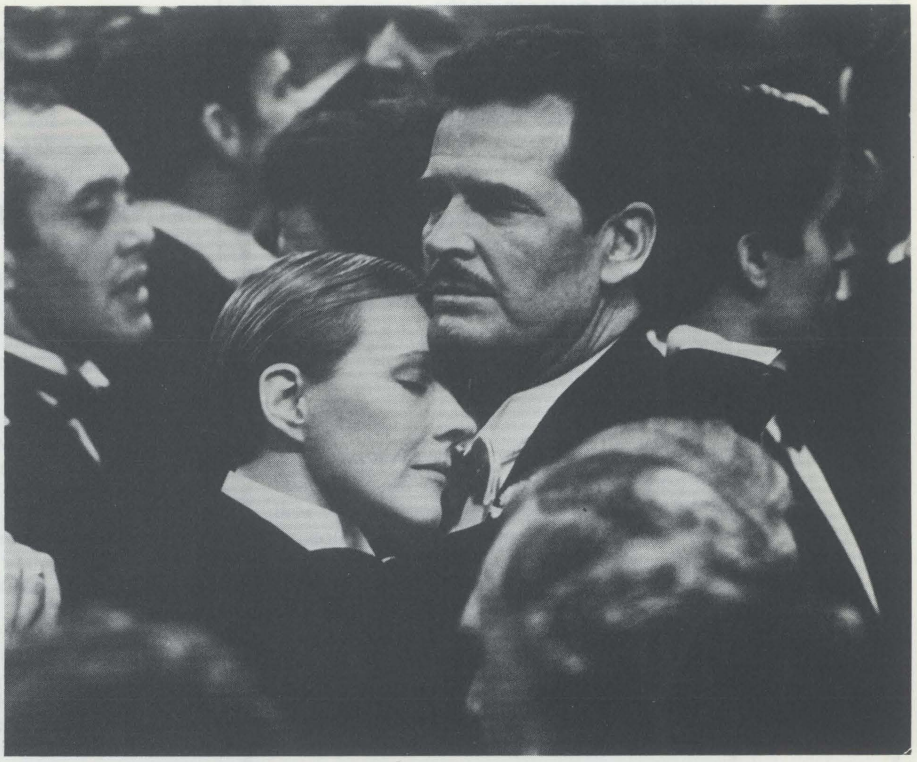
An instance of the charm of the film may be given in the moment when both men order coffee. Before this Wally has shown no self-confidence with the menu. Quietly, but with the dramatic impact of a pistol shot heard in the next room, Wally orders a glass of Amaretto, a peculiarly nauseous Italian *digestif*. André, the more sophisticated man, wisely does not follow suit. But he does pay the bill. He's a good guy too. □

'Two men who have knocked about the New York theatre.'

Taxi zum Ritz

Victor/Victoria

Gilbert Adair



Victor/Victoria (Julie Andrews) and King (James Garner).

A few years ago, the National Film Theatre held a retrospective of gay films, which consisted mostly of documentaries, case histories and fictional works centred on the more problematic aspects of the issue. Concurrently, as it so happened, it also screened a season of Fox musicals from the 40s and 50s. One evening in the foyer I overheard a sibilant gripe: 'How *do* they expect us to go and see *Nighthawks* in NFT2 when there's Carmen Miranda in NFT1?'

Though it would be absurd to claim for *Victor/Victoria* (UIP) that it succeeds in reconciling *Nighthawks* with Carmen Miranda (a questionable ambition, in any case), what Blake Edwards has done, with unhoped for panache, is overtly infiltrate the sophisticated 'European' comedy of the 30s with the kind of camp sensibility by which it was once far more discreetly informed. And therein lies the film's essential paradox, a more intriguing one than the 'woman playing a man playing a woman' hype surrounding Julie Andrews' double (or triple) performance. The achievement of *Victor/Victoria* is that, while containing nothing at which the gay community could take umbrage, its narrative unfailingly respects the strict conventions of classic bourgeois farce, from Feydeau to Ben Travers.

Since Edwards' film avoids preaching to the inverted, its principals popping in and out of sexual identities as frantically as Feydeau's would pop in and out of bedrooms, there can be little point in reproaching it with having failed to capitalise on the subtler tensions of cross-dressing. That, in the real world, Julie Andrews couldn't hope to pass for a man, however effete (even if, with her shiny doll-like features and Brylcreemed hair, she bears a bizarre resemblance to her namesake Archie), is therefore to the film's *advantage*. Likewise, the fact that James Garner's mobster, King Marchan, has to spy on this equivocal Susanna (from inside a closet) and reassure himself of her true gender before initiating their romance is compatible with both the original genre and the good-natured ribbing to which the film subjects it. King is a heterosexual, after all, and militant demands that he should actually have slept with someone he half suspects of being male are wholly beside the point, which is that for the first time in his life he has been forced to question the pious unreason of his sexual bigotry. As for Robert Preston's limp-wristed impresario, queen to Garner's King, his superb parody of ageing effeminacy dignifies what has too often been a mean-spirited comic stereotype while fulfilling exactly the same function in the narrative.

But no matter what else it pretends to, an elegant, romantic farce owes it to itself to be elegant, romantic and farcical—especially when, as is the case with *Victor/Victoria* (based on a jolly Ufa comedy and remade once before in Britain with Jessie Matthews, the 30s' Julie Andrews), it is set unashamedly in 'Paris, Paramount', that never-never spa where one took champagne as one takes the waters at Baden-Baden. Accordingly, the ciné-literate Edwards and his designer, Rodger Maus, have created a studio ambiance worthy of comparison with anything to be found in Lubitsch or Mamoulian, from the wintry Utrillo-esque Montmartre in which a starving, penniless Victoria braves all that the snow-machine can throw at her to the luxuriously pearly appointments of Victor's hotel suite.

Through these sets Preston in particular sashays as if to the mannerisms born, complaining not without reason that 'There's nothing so inconvenient as an old queen with a head cold' or blandly answering a query as to whether he has ever been in the army 'Once or twice . . .' As already in *S.O.B.*, where she contrived to bare her breasts without, so to speak, letting her hair down, what ambiguity there is in Julie Andrews' presence derives precisely from her game earnestness and much criticised elocutionary voice, in both films cleverly and maliciously exploited by her husband. Only James Garner looks ill-at-ease, which was doubtless the intention—except that he still looks ill-at-ease.

The revelation of the film, however, is Edwards' *mise en scène*. Despite a decade of pandering to the increasingly tedious Panther, he has somehow managed not only to preserve intact but also refine a Tati-inspired concept of the gag (already, if intermittently, evident in *The Party*) as proceeding less from his characters' relationship to the inanimate objects of traditional slapstick than to the cinematic frame itself and its invisible antechamber, off-screen space.

For example, from a dully conventional set-up of Andrews and Garner dancing cheek-to-cheek the camera slowly zooms back to reveal a ballroom of all-male couples; when, after ogling an obese pastry eater through a tearoom window, Victoria finally faints from hunger, the only clue to her condition is the huddle of sympathetic passers-by viewed from the other side of the window, while an enormous profiterole and its blubbery consumer continue to monopolise the foreground; and, in an outstanding effect, the havoc being wreaked inside a restaurant by a cockroach on the loose is distanced, *à la* René Clair, by an abrupt cut to the street outside, causing silence and stylisation to descend on the chaos.

Even more striking—because this time unprepared for by anything in the director's previous work—is the sheer power of expression with which he proves capable of investing individual shots, such as the authentically moving close-up of Andrews shedding tears at a performance of *Madam Butterfly* (a rather more cunning allusion than at first glance) or the mysterious laughter which shakes Preston during his climactic fandango in drag (a sequence reminiscent of 'Rose's Turn' in *Gypsy*) and which is caught by the camera with artful, newsreel-like candour.

At one point, barging his way into the nightclub where 'Victor' is singing, a boorish lounge lizard replies to those who attempt to shhh him: 'I don't care if it's Noël frigging Coward!' With *Victor/Victoria* there just might be the possibility that our humdrum contemporary cinema has discovered its own Ernst frigging Lubitsch. □

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BOOK REVIEWS

Films that never were

JEAN RENOIR: OEUVRES DE CINEMA INEDITES
edited by Claude Gauteur
Cahiers du Cinéma/ Gallimard, Paris/134 fr.

Compiled from a collection of synopses, treatments, dialogue continuities and scripts unearthed in the archives of the Compagnie Jean Renoir in Paris in 1978, this is an anthology of frustrations. Frustration for the reader, who is left to imagine the films that never were, and frustration for Renoir himself, who once lamented that if only he had not been obliged to waste so much time 'en visites sans résultat', he would have been able to add a dozen titles to his filmography. If only . . . ah, then we might now be chanting an entirely different litany of masterpieces incorporating *Les Millions d'Arlequin, Magnificat, Julienne et son amour* . . .

If there is the sadness here of the might-have-been, there is also exhilaration as Renoir the raconteur confides the stories he wants to tell, the precisions he wants to make, the secrets he wants to share. Trenchantly, for *Roméo et Juliette* (1935-39), he exposes the stumbling-block of the Montague-Capulet feud if Shakespeare is to be adapted to modern dress ('the bourgeoisie has long been accustomed to settle its internal quarrels through recourse to legal means'). Unexpectedly, given that none of his films with the marginal exception of *The River* focuses on the world of childhood, he outlines a sharp and unsentimental study of a twelve-year-old boy, a model pupil sidetracked into delinquency (*Histoire d'enfants*, 1938). Enchantingly, for *Christine* (1951?), he adumbrates a cross between *Camille* and *Showboat*, with Lena Horne as the beautiful demi-mondaine whose creamy skin belies her Negro blood.

Most of the pleasures offered are admittedly incidental, since many of the synopses are too brief to be really suggestive, while some (like the more detailed *Vincent Van Gogh* of 1953) fail to come off the paper. Others do spring vividly to life, of course: to read the treatment of *Les Millions d'Arlequin* (1938), a comedy-drama set in a dilapidated Mediterranean mansion where the heirs to an eccentric millionaire perform a ballet of quarrels, intrigues and romances as they hunt for the missing cash, can almost be screened in the mind as an astonishing anticipation of *La Règle du Jeu*. Difficult to estimate the extent to which such a 'screening' is facilitated by the fact that this is one of the rare cases in which it is known what actors Renoir had in mind: Jouvet, Stroheim, Fresnay, Pierre Renoir, Yvonne Printemps—the names add considerable flesh to the bare bones.

But in a way the readability of these projects as either literature or as skeletal movies is beside the point. This is an important book, indeed an indispensable one, in that it functions as a sort of *journal intime* filling in gaps in Renoir history. *The River*, for instance, made in 1950 and putting an end to Renoir's American period, has hitherto been something of a bone of contention. What was it that brought him to this edge of spiritual mysticism? The mysterious lure and lore of India itself? The traumatic experience of the war and his unhappy years in Hollywood? Or, as the detractors of his later work would have it, simply the onset of age?

One of the more detailed treatments in this volume is for a film called *Magnificat*, based on the true story of a group of monks who embarked on a journey into the unexplored heart of Brazil, determined to bring Christianity to a savage Indian tribe whom no one has ever lived to tell of seeing. They establish their mission in the jungle. They never see an Indian, though occasionally a monk is killed by an arrow. Resolutely showing neither fear nor hostility, they simply bury their dead and carry on with their patient devotions. And finally, after twelve years of fears and doubts . . . *magnificat*. Impossible to resume briefly but superbly developed by Renoir, it could have been a masterpiece in precisely the same serene and mystic vein as *The River*. It was written in 1940, hard on the heels of *La Règle du Jeu*.

Or again, there has always been the slight puzzle as to how the positive Renoir of the Popular Front, making *La Grande Illusion* and *La Marseillaise* in 1937, came to the pessimistic (or at least caustic) *La Règle du Jeu* in 1939 with only the 'politically neutral' *La Bête humaine* acting as a bridge. Was it purely the rumour of war that made the difference, or was there some more personal disenchantment? Part of the answer, at least, is provided by *Les Millions d'Arlequin*, written in 1938. At one point the hopeful heirs to the missing fortune, finding themselves getting nowhere with each trying to secure the money for himself, agree to a co-operative in which everybody will work for the common cause and share the profits. Significantly, it doesn't work; but, less bitter than *La Règle du Jeu* (a comparison also invited by the fact that the characters, penniless and trying to preserve their city clothes,

spend much of the film masquerading in costumes borrowed from a dressing-up box), *Les Millions d'Arlequin* allows the group to win through on another level by way of a scene in which, curiously prefiguring *The Exterminating Angel*, they are momentarily reduced to primitive, half-naked savages at a nocturnal barbecue party on the beach.

The richest section of this *journal intime*, logically enough, relates to the last years of Renoir's life when *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir* was the sole project to come to fruition, only to be widely and cruelly misunderstood as the ramblings of second childhood. More than once, in interviews at this time, Renoir expressed his regret for those early days of cinema when anything went 'and all films were good'. More and more, reading these later projects which echo effects and ideas familiar from the silent days (in *La Mort satisfaite*, a personification of 'weary Death' in the manner of the German Expressionists; in *C'est la Révolution!*, a marvellous use of popular song and imagery in the manner of Renoir's own first films), one comes to realise that Renoir was expressing more than mere nostalgia.

He was, in effect, trying to shake off the historical encrustations of sophistication that had attached themselves to movies over the years, trying to get back to the 'eternal verities' he used as a foundation for the wonderful fairytale world of *Le Carrosse d'or*, *French Cancan* and *Elêna*. But, as *Le Petit Théâtre* suggests, and as *C'est la Révolution!* or *Julienne et son amour* would have proved, Renoir was trying to push this reduction even further into what one can only call the simplicity of naiveté, digging down to bedrock for the purity and aristocracy of feelings he had in mind when he described the aviator who collapses the house of cards in *La Règle du Jeu* as 'un pur', or the tormented engine driver played by Gabin in *La Bête humaine* as 'un aristocrate'.

TOM MILNE

Frontiersmen

FILM ON THE LEFT: American documentary film from 1931 to 1942 by William Alexander
Princeton University Press/ $27.50 ($12.50 paperback)

Early in the Depression, a group of New York film-makers, most of whose parents were immigrants from Eastern Europe, founded the Workers Film and Photo League, because 'the world had to be shown what its eyes were turned away from', most notably by Hollywood films. Some of the film-makers were Communists, and most of the rest fellow travellers. Not content with showing widespread poverty and hunger, they worked above all to encourage viewer identification with the people they were filming, to arouse anger as well as pity. A few, heavily influenced by Soviet films of the 20s, later broke off to form NYkino, though even they eschewed Soviet formal innovations, relying instead on what they called internal montage, or careful composition of each shot in its own right.

Roosevelt's New Deal, Stalin's trials of dissidents and the growth of Fascism in Germany, Italy and Spain forced Communists all over the world into popular fronts with liberals. NYkino members were no exception, as they started working with more established and more native film-makers like Pare Lorentz and Willard Van Dyke (*The City* and *Valley Town*). In part out of admiration for Dovzhenko's film, the members of NYkino renamed their group Frontier in the late 30s, just after they met the most renowned film-maker who was to work with them, Joris Ivens. He devoted most of his energy working with Frontier to filming the international struggle against Fascism, but he also made *The Power and the Land* for Lorentz and Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace's Rural Electrification Administration.

William Alexander could have been more explicit and forthright about the political context of NYkino/Frontier's work, but *Film on the Left* is interesting for the acuity with which Alexander studies the way the film-makers worked together. Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz were the driving force behind NYkino/Frontier: the others remember the forcefulness of these two as the principal reason for the cohesiveness of the group. Yet they also remember the personal tensions brought on by the filial position into which they felt pushed by Hurwitz, in particular. They remember differently, contradicting each other and, occasionally and most revealingly, themselves. Alexander's treatment of these contradictions is the principal strength of *Film on the Left*; he is at his best constructing the psychology of the characters in his story.

To be sure, as he also points out, there were reasons for the group's end that had nothing to do with working relationships within it. The non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin crippled the Communist Party in the US, while the rush toward war combined with the New Deal to cause economic expansion and a perceptible lessening of misery there. Finally, many of those

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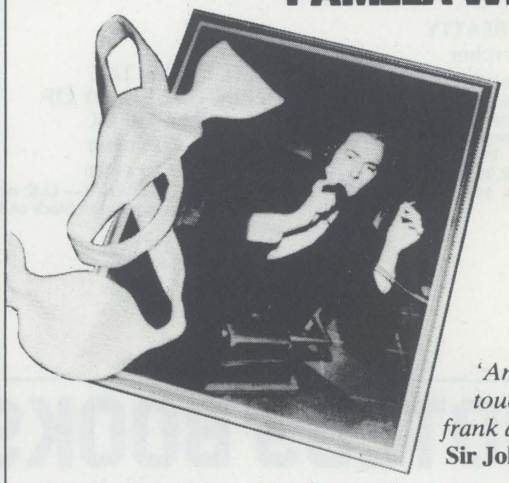

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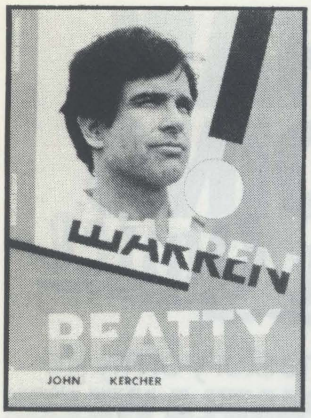

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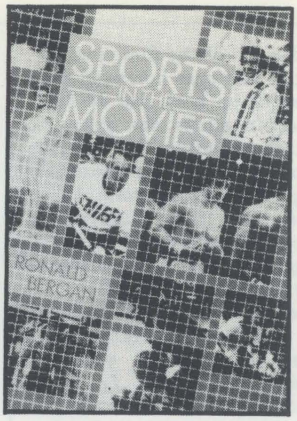

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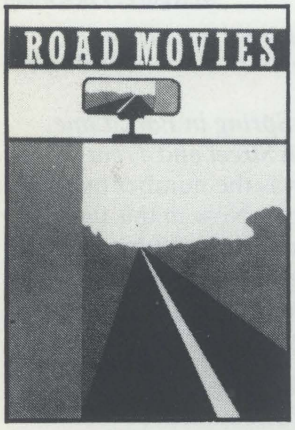

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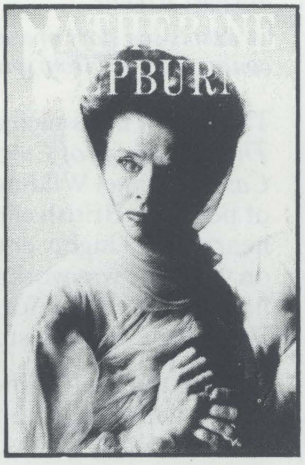

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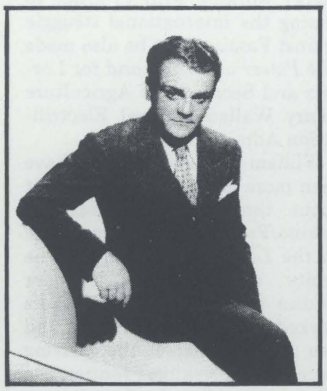

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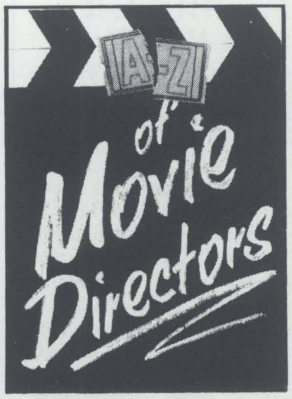

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working with Frontier encountered censorship of their films by those who had commissioned them. Alfred Sloan, the chairman of General Motors, had, through a foundation set up in his name, commissioned a set of films on contemporary problems such as technological unemployment. When he saw *Valley Town*, he recalled all the films and fired his brother as head of the Sloan foundation. He removed some scenes from *Valley Town* altogether and had others redubbed, with untrained readers replacing the professional actors Van Dyke had selected, all in order to attenuate the emotional impact of the film.

There are episodes of real interest in *Film on the Left*, but it is not well written: phrases like 'extremely potential', 'proud flag', and 'rather superbly' abound. More serious, Alexander has a habit of writing such phrases as 'Whatever the ultimate depth of their art', which have the effect of communicating his doubts while relieving him of the obligation to be specific about them. His most serious weaknesses are the obverse of his strengths at reconstructing the psychology of the members of NYkino/Frontier. This also leads him to speculate on their motives for including incidents in the films, apparently on the basis of his own reaction to the incidents while viewing the films, forty years later.

Finally, Alexander accepts Eisenstein as the leading Soviet film theorist, an assumption which leads him to emphasise the theatrical at the expense of the cinematic analysis of these films or, as he puts it himself, to emphasise viewer identification over understanding. This is particularly regrettable since Dziga Vertov, surely the leading theoretician of documentary filmmaking, particularly from a left perspective, was writing his most detailed polemics with Eisenstein during this very period.

The book's jacket, for instance, shows a Hollywood actor, Howard de Silva, in a publicity still based on a fictional sequence from *Native Land*. This is not documentary at all; it is not even a reconstruction of a historical incident, as many of Eisenstein's films are. Part of the problem here is of course that the Frontier film-makers did not make a sharp distinction between fiction and documentary, but the rest is that neither Alexander nor his editors did either. The result is a flawed book, revealing gaps in our knowledge of film history, in addition to those in the memories of Frontier members of their work together. None the less, *Film on the Left* is an interesting beginning to the process of relearning that history, and an accessible narrative of an important episode in the history of political dissent in the United States.

EDWARD BENSON

Woman of ideas

LULU IN HOLLYWOOD

by Louise Brooks

Knopf, New York/$15

Since Louise Brooks' autobiographical pieces first started appearing, in SIGHT AND SOUND and elsewhere, no one it seems has been able to get over the fact that she is beautiful and can write. William Shawn, editor of the *New Yorker*, joins the incredulous chorus in his introduction to this slim but absorbing collection. It begins, actually, to sound a little patronising, especially since, in their surprised delight over the felicities of style, most commentators omit to notice that Louise Brooks is also a woman of ideas. Her writings—and this, for an actor, really is extraordinary—are about something more than just herself.

She has ideas about Hollywood, she has ideas about life, and she does not necessarily confuse the two. In her most famous piece, 'Gish and Garbo', there may well be some colouring from her own experience which is not immediately apparent, but by and large it is an intelligent observer's estimation of something that happened in Hollywood and why it happened. (And she would be the first to admit that she was never in a position to have it happen directly to her.) Stars, she observed, the biggest stars anyway, seemed to go through a cycle of creation and destruction, both engineered by their studios. You would almost think that it was deliberate: the studios would make their own monsters, profit from them and then, like Frankenstein, when the monsters became too powerful and independent would set out to destroy them, and start again with someone else. Hence, Lillian Gish with MGM; hence, a few years later, Garbo with the same studio.

The notion is persuasive, and no one else seems to have put it in quite those terms. Certainly on some level it is true, but not, one suspects, on a conscious level—or not usually. (Louis B. may have deliberately sabotaged the career of the difficult John Gilbert, but why should he need to sabotage Lillian Gish's career when she was so bent on doing it herself through her own prim high-mindedness?) But then, if Louise Brooks has an Achilles heel, it is her own intelligence: she tends to attribute to others as much self-awareness and analytical power as she has herself.

She is very good at painting portraits of people, even if they are only thumbnail sketches, like the brief description of her period with the Bennett family (Constance, Joan et al) in the opening section. She is good on W. C. Fields as he really was, rather than as his posthumous elevation to 60s icon would have him (she was in the Follies with him, and later married to his most regular director, Eddie Sutherland). She is really revealing—or at any rate really persuasive—in her explanation of how another cult figure, Humphrey Bogart, got that way by rigorously suppressing his real character, 'a conventional, well-bred theatre actor', in favour of something he learned from his own tough-guy screen roles (she first knew Humphrey in 1924 and last saw an unrecognisable Bogey in 1943).

Inevitably, what we most want to know about is her working relationship with Pabst in her two most famous films, *Pandora's Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl*. She indulges us with one of the most substantial chapters in the book. The character of Pabst remains enigmatic, partly no doubt because at that stage in her life Louise Brooks spent a lot less time trying to understand him than he spent in trying to understand her. Clearly he succeeded, knowing exactly how to communicate wordlessly with her while with others he would talk endlessly, analysing for the intelligent and theatricalising for the old hams. According to this account of the collaboration, she was impossibly childish and tantrum-prone, and he was firm but not unkindly—a father figure if not a god. Well, if that is the way she says it was, one has complete confidence that's the way it was.

She also tells us interesting things, quite coincidentally. For those who have always wondered about the good-time girls in 20s and 30s movies, with the elaborate gifts they received and their curious method of repayment with a chaste goodnight kiss at the door (surely that was just a nod and a wink while the censor's back was turned?), she explains that 'sexual submission was not a condition of this arrangement, although many affairs grew out of it.' She should know, since she has been there; and one recognises that, whereas most people in her position would be protesting their sexual inviolability, even sixty years after the event, she would be most pained by having to admit the sad truth that 'ours was a heartless racket. After receiving an ermine coat from Jaeckel's, the gift of a stockbroker named John Lock, I let him take me just once to a tea dance at the Biltmore Hotel.' And she remembers his name . . .

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LETTERS

Napoleon

SIR,—While one admires the ingenuity with which Sean French (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1982) managed to disparage, in one way or another, almost everyone concerned with the revival of *Napoleon*, his suggestion that recent events following the film's Empire, Leicester Square showings are a case of history repeating itself as farce should not be allowed to go unchallenged. Whatever reservations one may have about Coppola's version, the same doubts can hardly be entertained concerning the British provincial screenings about which Mr French was so flippantly patronising—without apparently having actually attended any.

Three simple points need making: a) Nobody would pretend that a Cinemascope 'triptych' can remotely match a three-screen presentation—but it is still highly impressive. b) Does Mr French believe that even in the 20s films were always accompanied by a full orchestra? Piano accompaniment has always been a legitimate, if necessarily imperfect, alternative. c) Audience reaction everywhere (and I have seen the film in three different places) has been quite overwhelming. Here at Ipswich I have heard nothing but the very highest praise for the film itself, for its presentation, and for Mr Youdell's magnificent accompaniment. The theatre critic of *Vogue* should be aware of the enormous pleasure, and education, that he would deny so many people if he insisted that *Napoleon* be seen only by the privileged few able to attend the Empire. Indeed if his purist strictures were to be widely applied, how many old, and not so old, films would be shown at all?

Surely the question is not the academic 'how much can you take out of a reconstructed film before it stops qualifying as a reconstruction?' but rather 'under admittedly less than perfect conditions is Gance's film still recognisably a masterpiece?' The answer, triumphantly, is 'Yes.'

Yours faithfully,
GUY PHELPS
Ipswich Film Theatre

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *Britannia Hospital, Southern Comfort, The Driver, Hard Times.*
WALT DISNEY for *Tron.*
MGM for *The Hunger.*
20th CENTURY-FOX for *Conan the Barbarian, Kagemusha.*
UIP for *Blade Runner, Shoot the Moon, The Long Riders, The Warriors, Victor/Victoria.*
UNIVERSAL PICTURES for *The Last Movie.*
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ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Fitzcarraldo, Passion, Identification of a Woman.*
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CINEMATOGRAPH/ARNE CARLSSON for *Fanny and Alexander.*
CINEGATE for *My Dinner with André.*
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Citizens Band.*
GALA for *The Proud Ones.*
HANDMADE FILMS for *The Missionary, Scrubbers,* portrait of Mai Zetterling.
HUNGARO FILM for *Time Stands Still.*
MERCHANT IVORY PRODUCTIONS for *Heat and Dust.*
MICHAEL WHITE (LONDON) for *Moonlighting.*
NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL for *The Tom Machine.*
ZOETROPE for *One from the Heart, Hammett.*
EMILE DE ANTONIO for photograph of himself.
NEMAI GOSH for portrait of Ritwik Ghatak.
LONG PHOTOGRAPHY for picture of the Oscar ceremony.
SHMUEL THALER for cable TV pictures.
NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Komal Gandhar, Bari Theke Paliye, Ajantrik, Meghe Dhaka Tara, Words and Music, The Hot Heiress, Hallelujah I'm a Bum, Spring Is Here, The Phantom President,* pictures of Cinema City (Norwich), Tyneside Film Theatre.
THAMES TV for *The World at War.*

PRINTED BY Brown Knight and Truscott Ltd., London and Tonbridge, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES. (4 issues) £5.70 including postage. Back issues £1.45 including postage and packing. U.S.A. $14.00. Price per copy in United States $3.50. Back issues $3.50.
Binders to hold two years' issues £4.50, postage included ($10.50).
SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.
PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, April, July and October.

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●BELOW THE BELT
(*Productions Associates*)
Robert Fowler, a former documentarist, was, we are told, inspired by Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* to make this remarkable first feature on a waif's progress from hanging about (training after a fashion) with a travelling troupe of women wrestlers to a shot at the title, held by Terrible Tommy J. Dukes (Jane O'Brien), in the mean town of Birmingham, Alabama. Funny, slip-sliding and acted with undemonstrative ease by all the cast, this slice of Americana compensates for its rough edges and ultimately hackneyed plot (though, unlike *Rocky*s I and II, it charms with a genuine rather than ingenuous sincerity) by a delight in observation. The lore of the ring and the locker-room is neatly counterpointed by a string of Jerry Fielding–David Mackechnie lyrics belted out by Billy Preston (wrestlers, we hear, are given to 'gargling gin and gasoline' and we cut to a brief shot of Tommy silently, ominously washing out her mouth). Regina Baff, as the heroine who wants, uncertainly, to make something of herself, gives a stand-out performance. (Sierra Pecheur, Dolph Sweet.)

●THE DAY AFTER TRINITY
(*Blue Dolphin*)
Jon Else's sober and deeply disturbing documentary, co-written by David and Janet Peoples, about the scientists, and chiefly J. Robert Oppenheimer, who built and tested the first atomic bomb, conveys with telling and sometimes lyrical intensity the excitement (and only later the terror) of what it was like to be young and expectant, to have worked in makeshift conditions as a member of history's most brilliant scientific team, to have tested 'the gadget' at Trinity Site. The portrait of Oppenheimer and the inexorable consequences of the Faustian bargain he struck with the United States military is clearly documented: the scientists talk (not for the first time) with cathartic intensity, although Oppenheimer's brother Frank appears to carry his late brother's postwar burdens; and the first bomb is seen being assembled, like some Heath Robinson device, covered with sticking plaster, in newly declassified colour film. In no other film, perhaps, is the fateful aphrodisiac power of scientific discovery so clearly shown.

●THE GERMAN SISTERS
(*Miracle*)
Closely inspired by the lives of the Ensslin sisters, Gudrun who ended her life in a prison cell in Stammheim and Christiane a journalist, Margarethe von Trotta's moving film is a portrait of a relationship and an era. It mixes politics and patriarchy, tears and terrorism, to show how the daughters of a pastor took their need to be useful so seriously that one threw over her husband and son for a life on the run while the other, more of a gradualist in politics but equally determined, devoted herself to vindicating the reputation of her dead sibling. The film is a tale told by Juliane, the journalist, to her nephew Jan so that he shall not despise his mother Marianne. It is a tale of fanaticism and of the kind of bitter yet affectionate rivalry that perhaps only sisters achieve. So deeply did this vein run that Marianne was to die in outdoing Juliane. Overshadowing them both is the father they both feared and wished to impress, the patriarch enthroned whom Juliane as a little girl imagined raising his hand of wrath to smite them both. Bourgeois society did for them instead, and in this way von Trotta demonstrates how the feminist commitment is the link between the extravagance of 60s politics and the dull days of the present. The story is sober, economical and totally enthralling. (Jutta Lampe, Barbara Sukowa.)

●THE INQUISITOR
(*Gala*)
New Year's Eve: rain; a glittering civic ball in full swing across the street from police headquarters; a battered cop (Lino Ventura) settles down to a long night's interrogation of an assured and wealthy lawyer (Michel Serrault) suspected of having raped and murdered two children. Claude Miller's direction of this adaptation of John Wainwright's novel *Brainwash* is close in and coolly assured: our suspicions are as easily manipulated as the lawyer's defences are broken down; the world of safety and wealth, across the street, is just out of reach for the accused (and the cop)—the lawyer finally gives up, wearily confesses. But, with a melodramatic twist, we discover his innocence. Why did he capitulate, what manner of man (suggestions and hints of his life have been artfully revealed) is he? The fascination of denied knowledge. (Romy Schneider.)

●AN UNSUITABLE JOB FOR A WOMAN
(*Goldstar International*)
Chris Petit's second feature is a brave, if finally flawed, attempt to marry his own interests and influences to the generic demands of the English murder mystery. P. D. James' novel, in which a young female detective investigates a dubious suicide, is stripped of numerous characters and its detailed Cambridge background replaced by a more abstract sense of landscape; emphasis is placed on questions of sexual identity, worked out, or not, against a twisted family history. The problem is the way the whodunit narrative seems to run alongside, but never quite connect with these elements, leaving the film stranded somewhere between the art house and the high street. Nevertheless, certain scenes (the heroine dropped down a well; the re-enactment of the suicide) are excellent and neither Pippa Guard's performance nor Martin Schäfer's photography can be faulted. (Billie Whitelaw, Paul Freeman.)

THE BOAT
(*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
The most expensive German film ever made, and the budget is all up there on the screen—inside a U-boat. This paradox, along with the agreeable ship-in-a-bottle effect of a Steadicam deployed within such a cramped and cluttered space, occasionally distracts from the banality of the film's antiwar slant. (Jürgen Prochnow, Herbert Grönemeyer; director, Wolfgang Petersen.)

CHRIST STOPPED AT EBOLI
(*Artificial Eye*)
Sentimental in the best sense, Francesco Rosi's version of the Carlo Levi book about the condition of rural Southern Italy in the 1930s masks considerable analytical power beneath a discursive, even picturesque, narrative manner. (Gian Maria Volonte, Lea Massari.)

CIRCLE OF DECEIT
(*UIP*)
Covering the war in the Lebanon, a news correspondent with marital problems (hangdog Bruno Ganz) suffers a crisis of journalistic conscience. Beirut locations, with battle still rumbling, lend a stunning actuality that unkindly pinpoints the pompous rhetoric. (Hanna Schygulla, Jerzy Skolimowski; director, Volker Schlöndorff.)

CLEAN SLATE
(*Curzon*)
Alias Bertrand Tavernier's *Coup de Torchon*. One of those unfortunate movies: undertaken out of admiration for a neglected American novelist, it so perverts Jim Thompson's *Pop. 1280* that little emerges but a heavily symbolic muddle about a colonial police officer who assumes a murderous divine right against the wrongs of a racist society. (Philippe Noiret, Isabelle Huppert, Stéphane Audran.)

I, THE JURY
(*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Larry Cohen completed only one week's shooting on this latest Mickey Spillane adaptation before the project was handed over to Richard T. Heffron. Which perhaps explains why the ghost of an idea (Mike Hammer's cynicism mirrored in the CIA's murderous activities) is hopelessly buried in mindless and misogynistic violence. (Armand Assante.)

KILLER OF SHEEP
(*Globedrove*)
This impressionistic low-budget study of an impoverished black working man in the LA ghetto is grainily sincere but fatally scrappy and meandering. (Henry Gayle Sanders, Kaycee Moore; director, Charles Burnett.)

LOLA
(*Miracle*)
Barbara Sukowa's sulky Lola may be only half the vamp Dietrich's Lola-Lola was. Yet, in this satire on West Germany's 'economic miracle', Fassbinder's delirious visuals (parodying not only DeLuxe Color but, with its sickly pinks and mauves, DeLuxe Color already deteriorating) prove an admirable correlative for Sternberg's smokily Expressionist vision of the depressed 30s. (Armin Mueller-Stahl.)

MISSING
(*UIP*)
Another opportunistic political thriller from Costa-Gavras, reconstructing the mysterious disappearance of American Charles Horman after the anti-Allende coup in Chile. Strong on detail, but the message—a 'revelation' of American military involvement in the coup—rather thumps the tub. (Jack Lemmon, Sissy Spacek.)

NIGHT CROSSING
(*Walt Disney*)
A land of milk and honey lies across the border: here, in the German Democratic Republic, everything is unmitigated gloom. John Hurt and Beau Bridges set off for freedom with their families in a home-made multi-coloured balloon. Delbert Mann leaves not a stop un-pulled. (Jane Alexander.)

THE PICTURE SHOW MAN
(*Darvill Associates*)
This engaging atmospheric piece, graced by complementary performances from John Ewart and John Meillon, follows an old travelling showman gamely facing up to the challenge of the pictures in an idyllic Australia of the 20s. (Rod Taylor, Judy Morris; director, John Power.)

PRIVATE LESSONS
(*Sunn Classic*)
In which a silly teenage fantasy (my father's housekeeper is Sylvia Kristel and she wants to seduce me . . .) is barely concealed by an even sillier disappearing body-and-blackmail plot. Fans of *Steelyard Blues*, Alan Myerson's only other big-screen venture, will be puzzled and disappointed. (Eric Brown.)

SHOOT THE MOON
(*UIP*)
The old divorce game, with Albert Finney and Diane Keaton squabbling their way out of a soured marriage and four kids, only to find that the old emotions won't lie down. Perceptive script by Bo Goldman (of *Melvin and Howard*), but Alan Parker embellishes it with many a grand gesture.

THE TRIALS OF ALGER HISS
(*BUFC*)
Not surprisingly, given director John Lowenthal's background in law, this lengthy and absorbing examination of a seminal Cold War scandal is strongest when reassessing and casting doubts on the prosecution's testimony and evidence. Less convincing, because less thorough, is its reconstruction of historical background through newsreels and talking heads.

THE WAR AT HOME
(*The Other Cinema*)
The war is that in Vietnam and the particular stretch of the home front on which this rambling documentary focuses is the town of Madison, Wisconsin, a variety of whose citizens are interviewed with no great clarity of effect. (Directors, Glenn Silber, Barry Alexander Brown.)

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